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PSYCHE'S TASK

A DISCOURSE CONCERNING
THE INFLUENCE OF SUPERSTITION ON
THE GROWTH OF INSTITUTIONS

BY

J. G. FRAZER, D.C.L., LL.D., LITT.D.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

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Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably ; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds, which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out and sort asunder, were not more intermixt.

MILTON, *Areopagitica*.

Il ne faut pas croire cependant qu'un mauvais principe vicie radicalement une institution, ni même qu'il y fasse tout le mal qu'il porte dans son sein. Rien ne fausse plus l'histoire que la logique : quand l'esprit humain s'est arrêté sur une idée, il en tire toutes les conséquences possibles, lui fait produire tout ce qu'en effet elle pourrait produire, et puis se la représente dans l'histoire avec tout ce cortège. Il n'en arrive point ainsi ; les événements ne sont pas aussi prompts dans leur déductions que l'esprit humain. Il y a dans toutes choses un mélange de bien et de mal si profond, si invincible que, quelque part que vous pénétriez, quand vous descendrez dans les derniers éléments de la société ou de l'âme, vous y trouverez ces deux ordres de faits coexistant, se développant l'un à côté de l'autre et se combattant, mais sans s'exterminer. La nature humaine ne va jamais jusqu'aux dernières limites, ni du mal ni du bien ; elle passe sans cesse de l'un à l'autre, se redressant au moment où elle semble le plus près de la chute, faiblissant au moment où elle semble marcher le plus droit.

GUIZOT, *Histoire de la civilisation dans l'Europe*, Cinquième Leçon.

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TO
ALL WHO ARE ENGAGED
IN PSYCHE'S TASK
OF SORTING OUT THE SEEDS OF GOOD
FROM THE SEEDS OF EVIL
I DEDICATE THIS DISCOURSE

PREFACE

THE substance of the following discourse was lately read at an evening meeting of the Royal Institution in London, and most of it was afterwards delivered in the form of lectures to my class at Liverpool. It is now published in the hope that it may call attention to a neglected side of superstition and stimulate enquiry into the early history of those great institutions which still form the framework of modern society. If it should turn out that these institutions have sometimes been built on rotten foundations, it would be rash to conclude that they must all come down. Man is a very curious animal, and the more we know of his habits the more curious does he appear. He may be the most rational of the beasts, but certainly he is the most absurd. Even the saturnine wit of Swift, unaided by a knowledge of savages, fell far short of the reality in his attempt to set human folly in a strong light. Yet the odd thing is that in spite, or perhaps by virtue, of his absurdities man moves steadily upwards; the more we learn of his past history the more groundless does the old theory of his degeneracy prove to be. From false premises he often arrives at sound conclusions: from a chimerical theory he deduces a salutary practice. This discourse will have served a useful purpose if it illustrates a few

of the ways in which folly mysteriously deviates into wisdom, and good comes out of evil. It is a mere sketch of a vast subject. Whether I shall ever fill in these bald outlines with finer strokes and deeper shadows must be left to the future to determine. The materials for such a picture exist in abundance; and if the colours are dark, they are yet illuminated, as I have tried in this essay to point out, by a ray of consolation and hope.

J. G. FRAZER.

CAMBRIDGE, *February* 1909.

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I

INTRODUCTION

WE are apt to think of superstition as an unmitigated evil, false in itself and pernicious in its consequences. That it has done much harm in the world, cannot be denied. It has sacrificed countless lives, wasted untold treasures, embroiled nations, severed friends, parted husbands and wives, parents and children, putting swords, and worse than swords between them: it has filled gaols and madhouses with its innocent or deluded victims: it has broken many hearts, embittered the whole of many a life, and not content with persecuting the living it has pursued the dead into the grave and beyond it, gloating over the horrors which its foul imagination has conjured up to appal and torture the survivors. It has done all this and more. Yet the case of superstition, like that of Mr. Pickwick after the revelations of poor Mr. Winkle in the witness-box, can perhaps afford to be placed in a rather better light; and without posing as the Devil's Advocate or appearing before you in a blue flame and sulphureous fumes, I do profess to make out what the charitable might call a plausible plea for a very dubious client. For I propose to prove, or at least make probable, by examples that among certain races and at certain stages of evolution some social institutions which we all, or most of us, believe to be beneficial have partially rested on a basis of superstition. The institutions to which I refer are purely secular or civil. Of religious or ecclesiastical institutions I shall say nothing. It might perhaps be possible to shew that even religion has not wholly escaped the taint or

dispensed with the support of superstition ; but I prefer for to-night to confine myself to those civil institutions which people commonly imagine to be bottomed on nothing but hard common sense and the nature of things. While the institutions with which I shall deal have all survived into civilized society and can no doubt be defended by solid and weighty arguments, it is practically certain that among savages, and even among peoples who have risen above the level of savagery, these very same institutions have derived much of their strength from beliefs which nowadays we should condemn unreservedly as superstitious and absurd. The institutions in regard to which I shall attempt to prove this are four, namely, government, private property, marriage, and the respect for human life. And what I have to say may be summed up in four propositions as follows :—

I. Among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for government, especially monarchical government, and has thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order.

II. Among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for private property and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

III. Among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for marriage and has thereby contributed to a stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the unmarried.

IV. Among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for human life and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

Before proceeding to deal with these four propositions separately, I wish to make two remarks, which I beg you will bear in mind. First, in what I have to say I shall confine myself to certain races of men and to certain ages of history, because neither my time nor my knowledge permits me to speak of all races of men and all ages of history. How far the limited conclusions which I shall draw for some races and for some ages are applicable to others, must be left to future enquiries to determine. That is my first remark. My second is this. If it can be proved that in certain races and at certain times the institu-

tions in question have been based partly on superstition, it by no means follows that even among these races they have never been based on anything else. On the contrary, as all the institutions which I shall consider have proved themselves stable and permanent, there is a strong presumption that they rest mainly on something much more solid than superstition. No institution founded wholly on superstition, that is on falsehood, can be permanent. If it does not answer to some real human need, if its foundations are not laid broad and deep in the nature of things, it must perish, and the sooner the better. That is my second remark.

II

GOVERNMENT

WITH these two cautions I address myself to my first proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for government, especially monarchical government, and has thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order.

Among many peoples the task of government has been greatly facilitated by a superstition that the governors belong to a superior order of beings and possess certain supernatural or magical powers to which the governed can make no claim and can offer no resistance. Thus Dr. Codrington tells us that among the Melanesians "the power of chiefs has hitherto rested upon the belief in their supernatural power derived from the spirits or ghosts with which they had intercourse. As this belief has failed, in the Banks' Islands for example some time ago, the position of a chief has tended to become obscure ; and as this belief is now being generally undermined a new kind of chief must needs arise, unless a time of anarchy is to begin."¹ According to a native Melanesian account, the authority of chiefs rests entirely on the belief that they hold communication with mighty ghosts and possess that supernatural power or *mana*, as it is called, whereby they are able to turn the influence of the ghosts to account. If a chief imposed a fine, it was paid because the people firmly believed that he could inflict calamity and sickness upon such as resisted him. As soon as any considerable number of his subjects

¹ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians* (Oxford, 1891), p. 46.

began to disbelieve in his influence with the ghosts, his power to levy fines was shaken.¹ It is thus that in Melanesia religious scepticism tends to undermine the foundations of civil society.

Similarly Mr. Basil Thomson tells us that "the key to the Melanesian system of government is Ancestor-worship. Just as every act in a Fijian's life was controlled by his fear of Unseen Powers, so was his conception of human authority based upon religion." The dead chief was supposed still to watch jealously over his people and to punish them with dearth, storms, and floods, if they failed to bring their offerings to his tomb and to propitiate his spirit. And the person of his descendant, the living chief, was sacred; it was hedged in by a magic circle of taboo and might not even be touched without incurring the wrath of the Unseen. "The first blow at the power of the chiefs was struck unconsciously by the missionaries. Neither they nor the chiefs themselves realized how closely the government of the Fijians was bound up with their religion. No sooner had a missionary gained a foothold in a chief village than the tabu was doomed, and on the tabu depended half the people's reverence for rank. The tabu died hard, as such institutions should do. The first-fruits were still presented to the chief, but they were no longer carried from him to the temple, since their excuse—as an offering to persuade the ancestors to grant abundant increase—had passed away. No longer supported by the priests, the Sacred Chief fell upon evil days"; for in Fiji, as in other places, the priest and the chief, when they were not one and the same person, had played into each other's hands, both knowing that neither could stand firm without the aid of the other.²

In Polynesia the state of things was similar. There, too, the power of chiefs depended largely on a belief in their supernatural powers, in their relation to ancestral spirits, and in the magical virtue of taboo, which pervaded their persons and interposed between them and common folk an invisible but formidable barrier, to pass which was death. In New Zealand the Maori chiefs were deemed to be living

¹ R. H. Codrington, *op. cit.* p. 52. *Study of the Decay of Custom* (London,

² Basil Thomson, *The Fijians*, a 1908), pp. 57-59, 64, 158.

atuas or gods. Thus the Rev. Richard Taylor, who was for more than thirty years a missionary in New Zealand, tells us that in speaking a Maori chief "assumed a tone not natural to him, as a kind of court language ; he kept himself distinct from his inferiors, eating separately ; his person was sacred, he had the power of holding converse with the gods, in fact laid claim to being one himself, making the *tapu* a powerful adjunct to obtain control over his people and their goods. Every means were used to acquire this dignity ; a large person was thought to be of the highest importance ; to acquire this extra size, the child of a chief was generally provided with many nurses, each contributing to his support by robbing their own offspring of their natural sustenance ; thus, whilst they were half-starved, miserable-looking little creatures, the chief's child was the contrary, and early became remarkable by its good appearance. Nor was this feeling confined to the body ; the chief was an *atua*, but there were powerful and powerless gods ; each naturally sought to make himself one of the former ; the plan therefore adopted, was to incorporate the spirits of others with their own ; thus, when a warrior slew a chief, he immediately gouged out his eyes and swallowed them, the *atua tonga*, or divinity, being supposed to reside in that organ ; thus he not only killed the body, but also possessed himself of the soul of his enemy, and consequently the more chiefs he slew, the greater did his divinity become. . . . Another great sign of a chief was oratory—a good orator was compared to the *korimako*, the sweetest singing bird in New Zealand ; to enable the young chief to become one, he was fed upon that bird, so that he might the better acquire its qualities, and the successful orator was termed a *korimako*." ¹ Again, another writer informs us that the opinions of Maori chiefs "were held in more estimation than those of others, simply because they were believed to give utterance to the thoughts of deified men. No dazzling pageantry hedged them round, but their persons were sacred. . . . Many of them believed themselves inspired ;

¹ Rev. Richard Taylor, *Te Ika A Maui, or New Zealand and its Inhabitants*, Second Edition (London, 1870),

pp. 352 sq. ; as to the *atuas* or gods, see *ib.* pp. 134 sqq.

thus Te Heu Heu, the great Taupo chief and priest, shortly before he was swallowed up by a landslip, said to a European missionary: 'Think not that I am a man, that my origin is of the earth. I come from the heavens; my ancestors are all there; they are gods, and I shall return to them.'"¹ So sacred was the person of a Maori chief that it was not lawful to touch him, even to save his life. A chief has been seen at the point of suffocation and in great agony with a fish bone sticking in his throat, and yet not one of his people, who were lamenting around him, dared to touch or even approach him, for it would have been as much as their own life was worth to do so. A missionary, who was passing, came to the rescue and saved the chief's life by extracting the bone. As soon as the rescued man recovered the power of speech, which he did not do for half an hour, the first use he made of it was to demand that the surgical instruments with which the bone had been extracted should be given to him as compensation for the injury done him by drawing his sacred blood and touching his sacred head.²

Not only the person of a Maori chief but everything that had come into contact with it was sacred and would kill, so the Maoris thought, any sacrilegious person who dared to meddle with it. Cases have been known of Maoris dying of sheer fright on learning that they had unwittingly eaten the remains of a chief's dinner or handled something that belonged to him. For example, a woman, having partaken of some fine peaches from a basket, was told that they had come from a tabooed place. Immediately the basket dropped from her hands and she cried out in agony that the *atua* or godhead of the chief, whose divinity had been thus profaned, would kill her. That happened in the afternoon, and next day by twelve o'clock she was dead.³ Similarly a chief's tinder-box has proved fatal to several men; for having found it and lighted their pipes with it

¹ A. S. Thomson, M.D., *The Story of New Zealand* (London, 1859), i. 95 sq.

² Rev. W. Yate, *An Account of New Zealand* (London, 1835), pp. 104 sq., note.

³ W. Brown, *New Zealand and its Aborigines* (London, 1845), p. 76. Compare *Old New Zealand*, by a Pakeha Maori (London, 1884), pp. 96 sq.

they actually expired of terror on learning to whom it belonged.¹ Hence a considerate chief would throw away where it could not be found any garment or mat for which he had no further use, lest one of his subjects should find it and be struck dead by the shock of its inherent divinity. For the same reason he would never blow a fire with his mouth; for his sacred breath would communicate its sanctity to the fire, and the fire would pass it on to the meat that might be cooked on it, and the meat would carry it into the stomach of the eater, and he would die.² Thus the divinity which hedged a Maori chief was a devouring flame which shrivelled up and consumed whatever it touched. No wonder that such men were implicitly obeyed.

In the rest of Polynesia the state of things was similar. For example, the natives of Tonga in like manner believed that if any one fed himself with his own hands after touching the sacred person of a superior chief, he would swell up and die; the sanctity of the chief, like a virulent poison, infected the hands of his inferior, and, being communicated through them to the food, proved fatal to the eater, unless he disinfected himself by touching the chief's feet in a particular way.³ When a king of Tahiti entered on office he was girded with a sacred girdle of red feathers, which not only raised him to the highest earthly station, but identified him with the gods.⁴ Henceforth "everything in the least degree connected with the king or queen—the cloth they wore, the houses in which they dwelt, the canoes in which they voyaged, the men by whom they were borne when they journeyed by land, became sacred—and even the sounds in the language, composing their names, could no longer be appropriated to ordinary significations. . . . The ground on which they even accidentally trod, became sacred; and the dwelling under which they might enter, must for ever after be vacated by its proprietors, and could be appropriated only to the use of these sacred personages. No individual was allowed to

¹ Rev. R. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 164.

² Rev. R. Taylor, *op. cit.* pp. 164, 165.

³ W. Mariner, *Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, Second Edition

(London, 1818), i. 141 *sq.* note, 434, note, ii. 82 *sq.*, 222 *sq.*

⁴ W. Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, Second Edition (London, 1836), iii. 108.

touch the body of the king or queen ; and every one who should stand over them, or pass the hand over their heads, would be liable to pay for the sacrilegious act with the forfeiture of his life. It was on account of this supposed sacredness of person that they could never enter any dwellings, excepting those that were specially dedicated to their use, and prohibited to all others ; nor might they tread on the ground in any part of the island but their own hereditary districts.”¹

In like manner the Cazembes, in the interior of Angola, regarded their king as so holy that no one could touch him without being killed by the magical power which emanated from his sacred person ; however, any one who had accidentally or necessarily come into personal contact with his Majesty could escape death by touching the king’s hands in a special manner.² Similar beliefs are current in the Malay region, where the theory of the king as the Divine Man is said to be held perhaps as strongly as in any other part of the world. “Not only is the king’s person considered sacred, but the sanctity of his body is believed to communicate itself to his regalia, and to slay those who break the royal taboos. Thus it is firmly believed that any one who seriously offends the royal person, who touches (even for a moment) or who imitates (even with the king’s permission) the chief objects of the regalia, or who wrongfully makes use of any of the insignia or privileges of royalty, will be *kěna daulat*, *i.e.* struck dead, by a quasi-electric discharge of that Divine Power which the Malays suppose to reside in the king’s person, and which is called *daulat* or Royal Sanctity.”³ Further, the Malays firmly believe that the king possesses a personal influence over the works of nature, such as the growth of the crops and the bearing of fruit-trees.⁴ Some of the Hill Dyaks of Sarawak used to bring their seed-rice to Rajah Brooke to be fertilised by him ; and once when the rice-crops of a tribe were thin,

¹ W. Ellis, *op. cit.* iii. 101 sq. ; J. Wilson, *Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean* (London, 1799), pp. 329 sq.

² *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Erdkunde* (Berlin), vi. (1856) pp. 398 sq. ; F. T.

Valdez, *Six Years of a Traveller’s Life in Western Africa* (London, 1861), ii. 251 sq.

³ W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic* (London, 1900), pp. 23 sq.

⁴ W. W. Skeat, *op. cit.* p. 36.

the chief remarked that it could not be otherwise, since they had not been visited by the Rajah.¹

Similarly in Africa kings are commonly supposed to be endowed with a magical power of making the rain to fall and the crops to grow : drought and famine are set down to the weakness or ill-will of the king, and accordingly he is punished, deposed, or put to death.² To take two or three instances out of many, a writer of the eighteenth century speaks as follows of the kingdom of Loango in West Africa : "The government with these people is purely despotic. They say their lives and goods belong to the king ; that he may dispose of and deprive them of them when he pleases, without form of process, and without their having anything to complain of. In his presence they pay marks of respect which resemble adoration. The individuals of the lower classes are persuaded that his power is not confined to the earth, and that he has credit enough to make rain fall from heaven ; hence they fail not, when a continuance of drought makes them fearful about the harvest, to represent to him that if he does not take care to water the lands of his kingdom, they will die of hunger, and will find it impossible to make him the usual presents. The king, to satisfy the people, without however compromising himself with heaven, devolves the affair on one of his ministers, to whom he gives orders to cause to fall without delay upon the plains as much rain as is wanted to fertilize them. When the minister sees a cloud which he presumes must shed rain, he shews himself in public, as if to exercise the orders of his prince. The women and children troop around him, crying with all their might, *Give us rain, give us rain* : and he promises them some."³ The king of Loango, says another old writer, "is honoured among them as though he were a God : and is called *Sambee* and *Pango*, which mean God. They believe he can let them have rain when he

¹ Hugh Low, *Sarawak* (London, 1848), pp. 259 *sq.*

² For evidence see *The Golden Bough*, Second Edition (London, 1900), i. 154 *sqq.*, 157 *sqq.*; *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (London, 1905), pp. 112 *sqq.*

³ Proyard's "History of Loango, Kakongo, and other Kingdoms in Africa," in Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, xvi. 577. Compare Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique* (Amsterdam, 1686), pp. 335 *sq.*

likes ; and once a year, in December, which is the time they want rain, the people come to beg of him to grant it to them, on this occasion they make him presents, and none come empty-handed." On a day appointed, when the chiefs with their troops had assembled in warlike array, the drums used to beat and the horns to sound, and the king shot arrows into the air, which was believed to bring down the rain.¹ On the other side of Africa a similar state of things is reported by the old Portuguese historian Dos Santos. He says : " The king of all these lands of the interior and of the river of Sofala is a woolly-haired Kaffir, a heathen who adores nothing whatever, and has no knowledge of God ; on the contrary, he esteems himself the god of all his lands, and is so looked upon and revered by his subjects." " When they suffer necessity or scarcity they have recourse to the king, firmly believing that he can give them all that they desire or have need of, and can obtain anything from his dead predecessors, with whom they believe that he holds converse. For this reason they ask the king to give them rain when it is required, and other favourable weather for their harvest, and in coming to ask for any of these things they bring him valuable presents, which the king accepts, bidding them return to their homes and he will be careful to grant their petitions. They are such barbarians that though they see how often the king does not give them what they ask for, they are not undeceived, but make him still greater offerings, and many days are spent in these comings and goings, until the weather turns to rain, and the Kaffirs are satisfied, believing that the king did not grant their request until he had been well bribed and importuned, as he himself affirms, in order to maintain them in their error."² Nevertheless " it was formerly the custom of the kings of this land to commit suicide by taking poison when any disaster or natural physical defect fell upon them, such as impotence, infectious disease, the loss of their front teeth by which they were disfigured, or any other deformity or affliction. To put

¹ " The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battel," in Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, xvi. 330.

² J. Dos Santos, " Eastern Ethiopia," chapters v. and ix., in G. McCall Theal's *Records of South - Eastern Africa*, vii. (1901) pp. 190 sq., 199.

an end to such defects they killed themselves, saying that the king should be free from any blemish." However, in the time of Dos Santos the king of Sofala, in defiance of all precedent, persisted in living and reigning after he had lost a front tooth ; and he even went so far as to tax his royal predecessors with folly for having made away with themselves for such trifles as a decayed tooth or a little grey hair, declaring his firm resolution to live as long as he possibly could for the benefit of his loyal subjects.¹ At the present day the principal medicine-man of the Nandi, a tribe in British East Africa, is also supreme chief of the whole people. He is a diviner, and foretells the future : he makes women and cattle fruitful ; and in time of drought he obtains rain either directly or through the intervention of the rainmakers. The Nandi believe implicitly in these marvellous powers of their chief. His person is usually regarded as absolutely sacred. Nobody may approach him with weapons in his hand or speak in his presence unless he is first addressed ; and it is deemed most important that nobody should touch the chief's head, otherwise his powers of divination and so forth would depart from him.² This widespread African conception of the divinity of kings culminated long ago in ancient Egypt, where the kings were treated as gods both in life and in death, temples being dedicated to their worship and priests appointed to conduct it.³ And when the harvests failed, the ancient Egyptians, like the modern negroes, laid the blame of the failure on the reigning monarch.⁴

A halo of superstitious veneration also surrounded the Yncas or governing class in ancient Peru. Thus the old historian Garcilasso de la Vega, himself the son of an Ynca princess, tells us that "it does not appear that any Ynca of the blood royal has ever been punished, at least publicly, and the Indians deny that such a thing has ever taken place. They say that the Ynca never committed any fault that

¹ J. Dos Santos, *op. cit.* pp. 194 sq.

² A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi, their Language and Folk-lore* (Oxford, 1909), pp. 49 sq.

³ C. P. Tiele, *History of the Egyptian Religion* (London, 1882), pp. 103 sq. For fuller details see

A. Moret, *Du caractère religieux de la royauté pharaonique* (Paris, 1902); *The Golden Bough*, Second Edition, i. 161; *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (London, 1905), pp. 148 sq.

⁴ Ammianus Marcellinus, xxviii. 5, 14.

required correction ; because the teaching of their parents, and the common opinion that they were children of the Sun, born to teach and to do good to the rest of mankind, kept them under such control, that they were rather an example than a scandal to the commonwealth. The Indians also said that the Yncas were free from the temptations which usually lead to crime, such as passion for women, envy and covetousness, or the thirst for vengeance ; because if they desired beautiful women, it was lawful for them to have as many as they liked ; and any pretty girl they might take a fancy to, not only was never denied to them, but was given up by her father with expressions of extreme thankfulness that an Ynca should have condescended to take her as his servant. The same thing might be said of their property ; for, as they could never feel the want of anything, they had no reason to covet the goods of others ; while as governors they had command over all the property of the Sun and of the Ynca ; and those who were in charge, were bound to give them all that they required, as children of the Sun and brethren of the Ynca. They likewise had no temptation to kill or wound any one, either for revenge, or in passion ; for no one ever offended them. On the contrary, they received adoration only second to that offered to the royal person ; and if any one, how high soever his rank, had enraged any Ynca, it would have been looked upon as sacrilege, and very severely punished. But it may be affirmed that an Indian was never punished for offending against the person, honour, or property of any Ynca, because no such offence was ever committed, as they held the Yncas to be like gods.”¹

Nor have such superstitions been confined to savages and other peoples of alien race in remote parts of the world. They seem to have been shared by the ancestors of all the Aryan peoples from India to Ireland. Thus in the ancient Indian law-book called the Laws of Manu, we read : “ Because a king has been formed of particles of those lords of the gods, he therefore surpasses all created beings in lustre ; and, like the sun, he burns eyes and hearts ; nor can anybody on earth even gaze on him. Through his (supernatural) power he is

¹ Garcilasso de la Vega, *First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas*, translated by C. R. Markham (London, 1859), i. 154 sq.

Fire and Wind, he Sun and Moon, he the Lord of justice (Yama), he Kubera, he Varuna, he great Indra. Even an infant king must not be despised (from an idea) that he is a (mere) mortal ; for he is a great deity in human form ”¹ And in the same law-book the effects of a good king’s reign are thus described : “ In that (country) where the king avoids taking the property of (mortal) sinners, men are born in (due) time (and are) long-lived. And the crops of the husbandman spring up, each as it was sown, and the children die not, and no misshaped (offspring) is born.”²

Similarly in Homeric Greece, kings and chiefs were described as sacred or divine ; their houses, too, were divine, and their chariots sacred ;³ and it was thought that the reign of a good king caused the black earth to bring forth wheat and barley, the trees to be loaded with fruit, the flocks to multiply, and the sea to yield fish.⁴ When the crops failed, the Burgundians used to blame their kings and depose them.⁵ Similarly the Swedes always ascribed the abundance or scantiness of the harvest to the goodness or badness of their kings, and in time of dearth they have been known to sacrifice them to the gods for the sake of procuring good crops.⁶ In ancient Ireland it was also believed that when kings observed the customs of their ancestors the seasons were mild, the crops plentiful, the cattle fruitful, the waters abounded with fish, and the fruit-trees had to be propped up on account of the weight of their produce. A canon ascribed to St. Patrick enumerates among the blessings that attend the reign of a just king “ fine weather, calm seas, crops abundant, and trees laden with fruit.”⁷ Superstitions of the kind which were thus current among the Celts of Ireland centuries ago appear to have survived among the Celts of Scotland down to Dr. Johnson’s time ; for when he travelled in Skye it was still held that the return of the

¹ *The Laws of Manu*, vii. 5-8, translated by G. Bühler, p. 217 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv.).

² *The Laws of Manu*, ix. 246 sq., translated by G. Bühler, p. 385.

³ Homer, *Odyssey*, ii. 409, iv. 43, 691, vii. 167, viii. 2, xviii. 405 ; *Iliad*, ii. 335, xvii. 464, etc.

⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, xix. 109-114.

⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, xxviii. 5, 14.

⁶ Snorro Starleson, *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, translated by S. Laing, saga i. chapters 18 and 47.

⁷ P. W. Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland* (London, 1903), i. 56 sq.; J. O’Donovan, *The Book of Rights* (Dublin, 1847), p. 8, note.

chief of the Macleods to Dunvegan, after any considerable absence, produced a plentiful catch of herring ;¹ and at a still later time, when the potato crop failed, the clan Macleod desired that a certain fairy banner in the possession of their chief might be unfurled,² apparently in the belief that the magical banner had only to be displayed to produce a fine crop of potatoes.

Perhaps the last relic of such superstitions which lingered about our English kings was the notion that they could heal scrofula by their touch. The disease was accordingly known as the King's Evil ;³ and on the analogy of the Polynesian superstitions which I have cited, we may perhaps conjecture that the skin disease of scrofula was originally supposed to be caused as well as cured by the king's touch. Certain it is that in Tonga some forms of scrofula, as well as indurations of the liver, to which the natives were very subject, were thought to be caused by touching a chief and to be healed, on homœopathic principles, in the very same fashion.⁴ Similarly in Loango palsy is called the king's disease, because the negroes imagine it to be heaven's own punishment for treason meditated against the king.⁵ In England the belief that the king could heal scrofula by his touch survived into the eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson was touched in his childhood for scrofula by Queen Anne.⁶ It is curious that so typical a representative of robust common sense as Dr. Johnson should in his childhood and old age have thus been brought into contact with these ancient superstitions about royalty both in England and Scotland.

The foregoing evidence, summary as it is, may suffice to prove that many peoples have regarded their rulers, whether chiefs or kings, with superstitious awe as beings of

¹ S. Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands* (Baltimore, 1810), p. 115.

² J. G. Campbell, *Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1900), p. 5.

³ W. G. Black, *Folk - Medicine* (London, 1883), pp. 140 *sqq.* See further my *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, pp. 125-127.

⁴ W. Mariner, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, Second Edition (London, 1818), i. 434, note.

⁵ Proyard's "History of Loango, Kakongo, and other Kingdoms in Africa," in Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, xvi. 573.

⁶ J. Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, Ninth Edition (London, 1822), i. 18 *sq.*

a higher order and endowed with mightier powers than common folk. Imbued with such a profound veneration for their governors and with such an exaggerated conception of their power, they cannot but have yielded them a prompter and more implicit obedience than if they had known them to be men just like themselves. If that is so, I may claim to have proved my first proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for government, especially monarchical government, and has thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order.

III

PRIVATE PROPERTY

I PASS now to my second proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for private property, and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

Nowhere, perhaps, does this appear more plainly than in Polynesia, where the system of taboo reached its highest development; for the effect of tabooing a thing was, in the opinion of the natives, to endow it with a supernatural or magical energy which rendered it practically unapproachable by any but the owner. Thus taboo became a powerful instrument for strengthening the ties, perhaps our socialist friends would say riveting the chains, of private property. Indeed, some good authorities who were personally acquainted with the working of taboo in Polynesia, have held that the system was originally devised for no other purpose. For example, an Irishman who lived as a Maori with the Maoris for years, and knew them intimately, writes as follows: "The original object of the ordinary *tapu* seems to have been the preservation of property. Of this nature in a great degree was the ordinary personal *tapu*. This form of *tapu* was permanent, and consisted in a certain sacred character which attached to the person of a chief and never left him. It was his birthright, a part in fact of himself, of which he could not be divested, and which was well understood and recognized at all times as a matter of course. The fighting men and petty chiefs, and every one indeed who could by any means claim the title of *rangatira*—which in the sense I now use it means gentleman—were all in some degree more or less possessed of this mysterious

quality. It extended or was communicated to all their moveable property, especially to their clothes, weapons, ornaments, and tools, and to everything in fact which they touched. This prevented their chattels being stolen or mislaid, or spoiled by children, or used or handled in any way by others. And as in the old times, as I have before stated, every kind of property of this kind was precious in consequence of the great labour and time necessarily, for want of iron tools, expended in the manufacture, this form of the *tapu* was of great real service. An infringement of it subjected the offender to various dreadful imaginary punishments, of which deadly sickness was one." The culprit was also liable to what may be called a civil action, which consisted in being robbed and beaten; but the writer whom I have just quoted tells us that the worst part of the punishment for breaking taboo was the imaginary part, since even when the offence had been committed unwittingly the offender has been known to die of fright on learning what he had done.¹ Similarly, another writer, speaking of the Maoris, observes that "violators of the *tapu* were punished by the gods and also by men. The former sent sickness and death; the latter inflicted death, loss of property, and expulsion from society. It was a dread of the gods, more than of men, which upheld the *tapu*. Human eyes might be deceived, but the eyes of the gods could never be deceived."² "The chiefs, as might be expected, are fully aware of the advantages of the *tapu*, finding that it confers on them, to a certain extent, the power of making laws, and the superstition on which the *tapu* is founded will ensure the observance of them. Were they to transgress the *tapu*, they believe that the *attua* (God) would kill them, and so universal is this belief that it is, or rather was, a very rare occurrence to find any one daring enough to commit the sacrilege. To have preserved this influence so completely

¹ *Old New Zealand*, by a Pakeha Maori (London, 1884), pp. 94-97, compare *id.* p. 83.

² A. S. Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand* (London, 1859), i. 103. Compare E. Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand* (London, 1843), ii. 105 :

"The breaking of the *tapu*, if the crime does not become known, is, they believe, punished by the *atua*, who inflicts disease upon the criminal; if discovered, it is punished by him whom it regards, and often becomes the cause of war."

among a people naturally so shrewd and intelligent, great care must, no doubt, have been taken not to apply it unless in the usual and recognised manner. To have done otherwise would have led to its being frequently transgressed; and consequently to the loss of its influence. Before the natives came into contact with the Europeans the *tapu* seems to have acted with the most complete success; as the belief was general, that any disregard of it would infallibly subject the offender to the anger of the *attua*, and death would be the consequence. Independently, however, of the support which the *tapu* derives from the superstitious fears of these people, it has, like most other laws, an appeal to physical force in case of necessity. A delinquent, if discovered, would be stripped of everything he possessed; and if a slave, would in all probability be put to death—many instances of which have actually occurred. So powerful is this superstitious feeling that slaves will not venture to eat of the same food as their master; or even to cook at the same fire; believing that the *attua* would kill them if they did so. Everything about, or belonging to, a chief is accounted sacred by the slaves. Fond as they are of tobacco, it would be perfectly secure though left exposed on the roof of a chief's house; no one would venture to touch it.”¹

Hence it has been truly said that “this form of *tapu* was a great preserver of property. The most valuable articles might, in ordinary circumstances, be left to its protection, in the absence of the owners, for any length of time.”² If any one wished to preserve his crop, his house, his garments, or anything else, he had only to taboo the property, and it was safe. To shew that the thing was tabooed, he put a mark to it. Thus, if he wished to use a particular tree in the forest to make a canoe, he tied a wisp of grass to the trunk; if he desired to appropriate a patch of bulrush in a swamp, he stuck up a pole in it with a bunch of grass at the top; if he left his house with all its valuables, to take care of itself, he secured the door with a bit of flax, and the place straightway became inviolable, nobody would meddle with it.”³

¹ W. Brown, *New Zealand and its Aborigines* (London, 1845), pp. 12 sq.

² *Old New Zealand*, by a Pakeha Maori (London, 1884), p. 97.

³ Rev. R. Taylor, *Te Ika A Maui, or New Zealand and its Inhabitants*, Second Edition (London, 1870), pp. 167, 171.

Hence although the restrictions imposed by taboo were often vexatious and absurd, and the whole system has sometimes been denounced by Europeans as a degrading superstition, yet observers who looked a little deeper have rightly perceived that its enactments, enforced mainly by imaginary but still powerful sanctions, were often beneficial. "The New Zealanders," says one writer, "could not have been governed without some code of laws analogous to the *tapu*. Warriors submitted to the supposed decrees of the gods who would have spurned with contempt the orders of men, and it was better the people should be ruled by superstition than by brute force."¹ Again, an experienced missionary, who knew the Maoris well, writes that "the *tapu* in many instances was beneficial; considering the state of society, absence of law, and fierce character of the people, it formed no bad substitute for a dictatorial form of government, and made the nearest approach to an organized state of society."²

In other parts of Polynesia the system of taboo with its attendant advantages and disadvantages, its uses and abuses, was practically the same, and everywhere, as in New Zealand, it tightened for good or evil the ties of private property. This indeed was perhaps the most obvious effect of the institution. In the Marquesas Islands, it is said, taboo was invested with a divine character as the expression of the will of the gods revealed to the priests; as such it set bounds to injurious excesses, prevented depredations, and united the people. Especially it converted the tabooed or privileged classes into landed proprietors; the land belonged to them alone and to their heirs; common folk lived by industry and by fishing. Taboo was the bulwark of the landowners; it was that alone which elevated them by a sort of divine right into a position of affluence and luxury above the vulgar; it was that alone which ensured their safety and protected them from the encroachments of their poor and envious neighbours. "Without doubt," say the writers from whom I borrow these observations, "the first mission of taboo was to establish property the base of all society."³

¹ A. S. Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand* (London, 1859), i. 105.

² Rev. R. Taylor, *op. cit.* pp. 172 *sq.*

³ Vincendon-Dumoulin et C. Des-

In Samoa also superstition played a great part in fostering a respect for private property. That it did so, we have the testimony of a missionary, Dr. George Turner, who lived for many years among the Samoans and has given us a very valuable account of their customs. He says: "I hasten to notice the second thing which I have already remarked was an auxiliary towards the maintenance of peace and order in Samoa, viz. *superstitious fear*. If the chief and heads of families, in their court of inquiry into any case of stealing, or other concealed matter, had a difficulty in finding out the culprit, they would make all involved swear that they were innocent. In swearing before the chiefs the suspected parties laid a handful of grass on the stone, or whatever it was, which was supposed to be the representative of the village god, and laying their hand on it, would say, 'In the presence of our chiefs now assembled, I lay my hand on the stone. If I stole the thing may I speedily die.' This was a common mode of swearing. The meaning of the grass was a silent additional imprecation that his family might all die, and that *grass* might grow over their habitation. If all swore, and the culprit was still undiscovered, the chiefs then wound up the affair by committing the case to the village god, and solemnly invoking him to mark out for speedy destruction the guilty mischief-maker. But, instead of appealing to the chiefs, and calling for an oath, many were contented with their own individual schemes and imprecations to frighten thieves and prevent stealing. When a man went to his plantation and saw that some cocoa-nuts, or a bunch of bananas, had been stolen, he would stand and shout at the top of his voice two or three times, 'May fire blast the eyes of the person who has stolen my bananas! May fire burn down his eyes and the eyes of his god too!' This rang throughout the adjacent plantations, and made the thief tremble. They

graz, *Iles Marquises ou Nouk-hiva* (Paris, 1843), pp. 258-260. For details of the taboo system in the Marquesas Islands, see G. H. von Langsdorff, *Reise um die Welt* (Frankfort, 1812), i. 114-119; Le P. Matthias G * * * *Lettres sur les Isles Marquises* (Paris, 1843), pp. 47 *sqq.*

This last writer, who was a missionary to the Marquesas, observes that while taboo was both a political and a religious institution, he preferred to class it under the head of religion because it rested on the authority of the gods and formed the highest sanction of the whole religious system.

dreaded such uttered imprecations. . . . But there was another and more extensive class of curses, which were also feared, and formed a powerful check on stealing, especially from plantations and fruit trees, viz. the silent hieroglyphic taboo, or *tapui* (*tapooe*), as they call it. Of this there was a great variety.”¹

Among the Samoan taboos which were employed for the protection of property were the following:—1. *The sea-pike taboo*. To prevent his bread-fruits from being stolen a man would plait some cocoa-nut leaflets in the form of a sea-pike and hang one or more such effigies from the trees which he wished to protect. Any ordinary thief would be afraid to touch a tree thus guarded, for he believed that if he stole the fruit a sea-pike would mortally wound him the next time he went to sea. 2. *The white-shark taboo*. A man would plait a cocoa-nut leaf in the shape of a shark and hang it on a tree. This was equivalent to an imprecation that the thief might be devoured by a shark the next time he went to fish. 3. *The cross-stick taboo*. This was a stick hung horizontally on the tree. It expressed a wish that whoever stole fruit from the tree might be afflicted with a sore running right across his body till he died. 4. *The ulcer taboo*. This was made by burying some pieces of clam-shell in the ground and setting up at the spot several reeds tied together at the top in a bunch like the head of a man. By this the owner signified his wish that the thief might be laid low with ulcerous sores all over his body. If the thief happened thereafter to be troubled with swellings or sores, he confessed his fault and sent a present to the owner of the land, who in return sent to the culprit a herb both as a medicine and as a pledge of forgiveness. 5. *The thunder taboo*. A man would plait cocoa-nut leaflets in the form of a small square mat and suspend it from a tree, adding some white streamers of native cloth. A thief believed that for trespassing on such a tree he or his children might be struck by lightning, or perhaps that lightning might strike and blast his own trees. “From these few illustrations,” says Dr. Turner in conclusion, “it will be observed that Samoa formed no

¹ G. Turner, *Samoa* (London, 1884), pp. 183-184.

exception to the remarkably wide-spread system of superstitious taboo ; and the extent to which it preserved honesty and order among a heathen people will be readily imagined.”¹

In Tonga a man guilty of theft or of any other crime was said to have broken the taboo, and as such persons were supposed to be particularly liable to be bitten by sharks, all on whom suspicion fell were compelled to go into water frequented by sharks ; if they were bitten or devoured, they were guilty ; if they escaped, they were innocent.²

In Melanesia also a system of taboo (*tambu, tapu*) exists ; it is described as “a prohibition with a curse expressed or implied,” and derives its sanction from a belief that the chief or other person who imposes a taboo has the support of a powerful ghost or spirit (*tindalo*). If a common man took it upon himself to taboo anything, people would watch to see whether a transgressor of the taboo fell sick ; if he did, it was a proof that the man who imposed the taboo was backed by a powerful ghost, and his reputation would rise accordingly. Each ghost affected a particular sort of leaf, which was his taboo mark.³ In New Britain plantations, cocoa-nut trees, and other possessions are protected against thieves by marks of taboo attached to them, and it is thought that whoever violates the taboo will be visited by sickness or other misfortune. The nature of the sickness or misfortune varies with that of the mark or magical object which embodies the mystic virtue of the taboo. One plant used for this purpose will cause the thief’s head to ache ; another will make his thighs swell ; another will break his legs ; and so forth. Even the murmuring of a spell over a fence is believed to ensure that whoever steals sticks from the fence will have a swollen head.⁴ In Fiji the institution of taboo was the secret of power and the strength of despotic rule. It was wondrously diffused, affecting things great and small. Here it might be seen tending a brood of chickens and there directing the energies

¹ G. Turner, *Samoa*, pp. 185-188.

² W. Mariner, *An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands*, Second Edition (London, 1818), ii. 221.

³ R. H. Codrington, *The Melan-*

esians (Oxford, 1891), pp. 215 sq.

⁴ R. Parkinson, *Im Bismarck-Archipel* (Leipsic, 1887), p. 144 ; *id.*, *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee* (Stuttgart, 1907), pp. 193 sq.

of a kingdom. The custom was much in favour with the chiefs, who adjusted it so that it sat lightly on them and heavily on others. By it they gained influence, supplied their wants, and commanded at will their inferiors. In imposing a taboo a chief need only be checked by a regard for ancient precedent. Inferior persons endeavoured by the help of the system to put their yam-beds and plantain-plots within a sacred pale.¹

A system of taboo based on superstition prevails all over the islands of the Malay Archipelago, where the common term for taboo is *pamali*, *pomali*, or *pemali*, though in some places other words, such as *poso*, *potu*, or *boboso* are in use to express the same idea.² In this great region also the superstition associated with taboo is a powerful instrument to enforce the rights of private property. Thus, in the island of Timor "a prevalent custom is the *pomali*, exactly equivalent to the 'taboo' of the Pacific islanders and equally respected. It is used on the commonest occasions, and a few palm leaves stuck outside a garden as a sign of the *pomali* will preserve its produce from thieves as effectually as the threatening notice of man-traps, spring guns, or a savage dog would do with us."³ In Amboyna the word for taboo is *pamali*. A man who wishes to protect his fruit-trees or other possessions against theft may do it in various ways. For example, he may make a white cross on a pot and hang the pot on the fruit-tree; then the thief who steals fruit from that tree will be a leper. Or he may place the effigy of a mouse under the tree; then the thief will have marks on his nose and ears as if a mouse had gnawed them. Or he may plait dry sago leaves into two round discs and tie them to the tree; then the thief's body will swell up and burst.⁴ In Ceram the methods of protecting property from thieves are similar. For example, a man places a pig's jaw in the branches of his fruit-tree; after that any person who

¹ Thomas Williams, *Fiji and the Fijians*, Second Edition (London, 1860), i. 234.

² G. A. Wilken, *Handleiding voor de vergelijkende Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië* (Leyden, 1893), pp. 596-603; G. W. W. C. Baron van Hoëvell, *Ambon en meer bepaaldelijk de*

Oeliasers (Dordrecht, 1875), pp. 148-152.

³ A. R. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, Sixth Edition (London, 1877), p. 196.

⁴ J. G. F. Riedel, *De sluik- en kroesharige rassen tusschen Selebes en Papua* (The Hague, 1886), pp. 61 sq.

dares to steal the fruit from the tree will be rent in pieces by a wild boar. The image of a crocodile with a thread of red cotton tied round its neck will be equally efficacious ; the thief will be devoured by a crocodile. A wooden effigy of a snake will make the culprit to be stung by a serpent. A figure of a cat with a red band round its neck will cause all who approach the tree with evil intentions to suffer from excruciating pains in their stomachs, as if a cat were clawing their insides.¹ An image of a swallow will cause the thief to suffer as if a swallow were pecking his eyes out : a piece of thorny wood and a red spongy stone will inflict piercing pangs on him and make his whole body to be red and pitted with minute holes : a burnt-out brand will cause his house to burst into flames, without any apparent reason ; and so on.² Similarly in the Ceram Laut Islands a man protects his cocoa-nut trees or sago palms by placing charmed objects at the foot of them. For example, he puts the effigy of a fish under his cocoa-nut trees and says, " Grandfather fish, cause the person who steals my cocoa-nuts to be sick and vomit." The culprit accordingly is seized with pains in his stomach and can only be relieved of them by the owner of the cocoanuts, who spits betel-nut juice on the ailing part and blows into the sufferer's ear, saying, " Grandfather fish, return to the sea. You have there room enough and great rocks of coral where you can swim about." Or again he may make a miniature coffin and place it on the ground under the tree ; then the thief will suffer from shortness of breath and a feeling of suffocation, as if he were actually shut up in a coffin. And many other devices there are whereby in these islands the owner of fruit-trees protects the fruit from the depredations of his unscrupulous neighbours. In every case he deposits at the foot of the tree or fastens to the trunk a charmed object, which he regards as endowed with supernatural powers, and he invokes its aid to guard his possessions.³

¹ J. G. F. Riedel, *op. cit.* pp. 114 sq.

² Van Schmidt, " Aanteekeningen nopens de zeden, gewoonten en gebruiken, benevens de vooroordeelen en bijgeloovigheden der bevolking van de eilanden Saparoea, Haroekoe, Noessa

Laut, en van een gedeelte van de zuidkust van Ceram, in vroegeren en lateren tijd," *Tijdschrift voor Neêrlands Indie*, v. Tweede deel (Batavia, 1843), pp. 499-502.

³ J. G. F. Riedel, *op. cit.* pp. 167 sq.

In Madagascar there is an elaborate system of taboo known as *fady*.¹ It has been carefully studied in a learned monograph by Mr. A. van Gennep,² who argues that originally all property was based on religion, and that marks of property were marks of taboo.³ However, so far as the evidence permits us to judge, it does not appear that the system has been used by the Malagasy for the protection of property to the same extent as by the Polynesians, the Melanesians, and the Indonesians. But we hear of Malagasy charms placed in the fields to afflict with leprosy and other maladies any persons who should dare to steal from them.⁴ And we are told that some examples of *fady* or taboo "seem to imply a curious basis for the moral code in regard to the rights of property among the last generation of Malagasy. It does not appear to have been *fady* to steal in general, but certain articles were specified, to steal which there were various penalties attached. Thus, to steal an egg caused the thief to become leprous; to steal *landy* (native silk) caused blindness or some other infirmity. And to steal iron was also visited by some bodily affliction."⁵ In order to recover stolen property the Malagasy had recourse to a deity called Ramanandroany. The owner would take a remnant of the thing that had been purloined, and going with it to the idol would say, "As to whoever stole our property, O Ramanandroany, kill him by day, destroy him by night, and strangle him; let there be none amongst men like him; let him not be able to increase in riches, not even a farthing, but let him pick up his livelihood as a hen pecks rice-grains; let his eyes be blinded, and his knees swollen, O Ramanandroany." It was supposed that these curses fell on the thief.⁶

Similar modes of enforcing the rights of private property

¹ H. F. Standing, "Malagasy *fady*," *The Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, vol. ii. (Antananarivo, 1896), pp. 252-265 (*Reprint of the second Four Numbers*).

² A. van Gennep, *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar* (Paris, 1904).

³ A. van Gennep, *op. cit.* pp. 183 sqq.

⁴ A. van Gennep, *Tabou et Totémisme à Madagascar*, p. 184. The writer has devoted a chapter (xi. pp. 183-193) to taboos of property.

⁵ H. F. Standing, "Malagasy *fady*," *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine*, ii. (Antananarivo, 1896), p. 256.

⁶ W. Ellis, *History of Madagascar*, i. 414.

by the aid of superstitious fears have been adopted in many other parts of the world. The subject has been copiously illustrated by Dr. Edward Westermarck in his very learned work on the origin and development of the moral ideas.¹ Here I can cite only a few cases out of many. In Ceylon, when a person wishes to protect his fruit-trees from thieves, he hangs up certain grotesque figures round the orchard and dedicates it to the devils. After that no native will dare to touch the fruit; even the owner himself will not venture to use it till the charm has been removed by a priest, who naturally receives some of the fruit for his trouble.² The Indians of Cumana in South America surrounded their plantations with a single cotton thread, and this was safeguard enough; for it was believed that any trespasser would soon die. The Juris of Brazil adopt the same simple means of stopping gaps in their fences.³ In Africa also superstition is a powerful ally of the rights of private property. Thus the Balonda place beehives on high trees in the forest and protect them against thieves by tying a charm or "piece of medicine" round the tree-trunks. This proves a sufficient protection. "The natives," says Livingstone, "seldom rob each other, for all believe that certain medicines can inflict disease and death; and though they consider that these are only known to a few, they act on the

¹ E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, ii. (London, 1908), pp. 59-69. In an article on taboo published many years ago (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, xxiii. (1888), pp. 15 *sqq.*) I briefly pointed out the part which the system of taboo has played in the evolution of law and morality. I may be allowed to quote a passage from the article: "The original character of the taboo must be looked for not in its civil but in its religious element. It was not the creation of a legislator, but the gradual outgrowth of animistic beliefs, to which the ambition and avarice of chiefs and priests afterwards gave an artificial extension. But in serving the cause of avarice and ambition it subserved the cause of civilization, by fostering conceptions of the rights of property and the sanctity of the mar-

riage tie,—conceptions which in time grew strong enough to stand by themselves and to fling away the crutch of superstition which in earlier days had been their sole support. For we shall scarcely err in believing that even in advanced societies the moral sentiments, in so far as they are merely sentiments and are not based on an induction from experience, derive much of their force from an original system of taboo. Thus on the taboo were grafted the golden fruits of law and morality, while the parent stem dwindled slowly into the sour crabs and empty husks of popular superstition on which the swine of modern society are still content to feed."

² R. Percival, *Account of the Island of Ceylon* (London, 1803), p. 198.

³ C. F. Ph. v. Martius, *Zur Ethnographie Amerikas, zumal Brasiliens* (Leipsic, 1867), p. 86.

principle that it is best to let them all alone. The gloom of these forests strengthens the superstitious feelings of the people. In other quarters, where they are not subjected to this influence, I have heard the chiefs issue proclamations to the effect, that real witchcraft medicines had been placed at certain gardens from which produce had been stolen; the thieves having risked the power of the ordinary charms previously placed there.”¹

Amongst the Nandi of British East Africa nobody dares to steal anything from a smith; for if he did, the smith would heat his furnace, and as he blew the bellows to make the flames roar he would curse the thief so that he would die. And in like manner among these people, with whom the potters are women, nobody dares to filch anything from a potter; for next time she heated her wares the potter would curse him, saying, “Burst like a pot, and may thy house become red,” and the thief so cursed would die.² In Loango, when a man is about to absent himself from home for a considerable time he protects his hut by placing a charm or fetish before it, consisting perhaps of a branch with some bits of broken pots or trash of that sort; and we are told that even the most determined robber would not dare to cross a threshold defended by these mysterious signs.³ On the coast of Guinea fetishes are sometimes inaugurated for the purpose of detecting and punishing certain kinds of theft; and not only the culprit himself, but any person who knows of his crime and fails to give information is liable to be punished by the fetish. When such a fetish is instituted, the whole community is warned of it, so that he who transgresses thereafter does so at his peril. For example, a fetish was set up to prevent sheep-stealing and the people received warning in the usual way. Shortly afterwards a slave who had not heard of the law, stole a sheep and offered to divide it with a friend. The friend had often before shared with him in similar enterprises, but the fear of the fetish was now too strong for him; he informed on the

¹ David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857), p. 285.

² A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi, their Language and Folk-lore* (Oxford, 1909),

pp. 36, 37.

³ Proyard's "History of Loango, Kakongo, and other Kingdoms in Africa," Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, xvi. 595.

thief, who was brought to justice and died soon after of a lingering and painful disease. Nobody in the country ever doubted but that the fetish had killed him.¹ Among the Ewe-speaking tribes of the Slave Coast in West Africa houses and household property are guarded by amulets (*vö-sesao*), which derive their virtue from being consecrated or belonging to the gods. The crops, also, in solitary glades of the forest, are left under the protection of such amulets, generally fastened to long sticks in some conspicuous position; and so guarded they are quite safe from pillage. By the side of the paths, too, may be seen food and palm-wine lying exposed for sale with nothing but a charm to protect them; a few cowries placed on each article indicates its price. Yet no native would dare to take the food or the wine without depositing its price; for he dreads the unknown evil which the god who owns the charm would bring upon him for thieving.² In Sierra Leone charms, called *greegrees*, are often placed in plantations to deter people from stealing, and it is said that "a few old rags placed upon an orange tree will generally, though not always, secure the fruit as effectually as if guarded by the dragons of the Hesperides. When any person falls sick, if, at the distance of several months, he recollects having stolen fruit, etc., or having taken it *softly* as they term it, he immediately supposes *wangka* has caught him, and to get cured he must go or send to the person whose property he had taken, and make to him whatever recompense he demands."³ Superstitions of the same sort have been transported by the negroes to the West Indies, where the name for magic is *obi* and the magician is called the *obeah* man. There also, we are told, the stoutest-hearted negroes "tremble at the very sight of the ragged bundle, the bottle or the egg-shells, which are stuck in the thatch or hung over the door of a hut, or upon the branch of a plantain tree, to deter marauders. . . . When a negro is robbed of a fowl or

¹ Rev. J. Leighton Wilson, *Western Africa* (London, 1856), pp. 275 sq.

² A. B. Ellis, *The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (London, 1890), pp. 91 sq. Compare *id.*, *The Yoruba-speaking*

Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa (London, 1894), p. 118.

³ Thomas Winterbottom, *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone* (London, 1803), pp. 261 sq.

a hog, he applies directly to the *Obeah*-man or woman ; it is then made known among his fellow blacks, that *obi* is set for the thief ; and as soon as the latter hears the dreadful news, his terrified imagination begins to work, no resource is left but in the superior skill of some more eminent *Obeah*-man of the neighbourhood, who may counteract the magical operations of the other ; but if no one can be found of higher rank and ability ; or if, after gaining such an ally, he should still fancy himself affected, he presently falls into a decline, under the incessant horror of impending calamities. The slightest painful sensation in the head, the bowels, or any other part, any casual loss or hurt, confirms his apprehensions, and he believes himself the devoted victim of an invisible and irresistible agency. Sleep, appetite and cheerfulness forsake him ; his strength decays, his disturbed imagination is haunted without respite, his features wear the settled gloom of despondency ; dirt, or any other unwholesome substance, becomes his only food ; he contracts a morbid habit of body, and gradually sinks into the grave.”¹ Superstition has killed him.

Similar evidence might doubtless be multiplied, but the foregoing cases suffice to shew that among many peoples and in many parts of the world superstitious fear has operated as a powerful motive to deter men from stealing. If that is so, then my second proposition may be regarded as proved, namely, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for private property and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

¹ Bryan Edwards, *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies*, Fifth Edition (London, 1819), ii. 107-111.

IV

MARRIAGE

I PASS now to my third proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for marriage, and has thereby contributed to a stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the unmarried. That this is true will appear, I think, from the following instances.

Among the Karens of Burma "adultery, or fornication, is supposed to have a powerful influence to injure the crops. Hence, if there have been bad crops in a village for a year or two, and the rains fail, the cause is attributed to secret sins of this character, and they say the God of heaven and earth is angry with them on this account; and all the villagers unite in making an offering to appease him." And when a case of adultery or fornication has come to light, "the elders decide that the transgressors must buy a hog, and kill it. Then the woman takes one foot of the hog, and the man takes another, and they scrape out furrows in the ground with each foot, which they fill with the blood of the hog. They next scratch the ground with their hands and pray: 'God of heaven and earth, God of the mountains and hills, I have destroyed the productiveness of the country. Do not be angry with me, do not hate me; but have mercy on me, and compassionate me. Now I repair the mountains, now I heal the hills, and the streams and the lands. May there be no failure of crops, may there be no unsuccessful labours, or unfortunate efforts in my country. Let them be dissipated to the foot of the horizon. Make thy paddy fruitful, thy rice abundant. Make the vegetables to flourish.

If we cultivate but little, still grant that we may obtain a little.' After each has prayed thus, they return to the house and say they have repaired the earth."¹ Thus, according to the Karens adultery and fornication are not simply moral offences which concern no one but the culprits and their families: they physically affect the course of nature by blighting the earth and destroying its fertility; hence they are public crimes which threaten the very existence of the whole community by cutting off its food supplies at the root. But the physical injury which these offences do to the soil can be physically repaired by saturating it with pig's blood.

Some of the tribes of Assam similarly trace a connection between the crops and the behaviour of the human sexes; for they believe that so long as the crops remain ungarnered, the slightest incontinence would ruin all.² Again, the inhabitants of the hills near Rajamahall in Bengal imagine that adultery, undetected and unexpiated, causes the inhabitants of the village to be visited by a plague or destroyed by tigers or other ravenous beasts. To prevent these evils an adultress generally makes a clean breast. Her paramour has then to furnish a hog, and he and she are sprinkled with its blood, which is supposed to wash away their sin and avert the divine wrath. When a village suffers from plague or the ravages of wild beasts, the people religiously believe that the calamity is a punishment for secret immorality, and they resort to a curious form of divination to discover the culprits, in order that the crime may be duly expiated.³ The Khasis of Assam are divided into a number of clans which are exogamous, that is to say, no man may marry a woman of his own clan. Should a man be found to cohabit with a woman of his own clan, it is treated as incest and is believed to cause great disasters; the people will be struck by lightning or killed by tigers,

¹ Rev. F. Mason, D.D., "On Dwellings, Works of Art, Laws, etc., of the Karens," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, xxxvii. (1868) part ii. No. 3, pp. 147 sq. Compare A. R. McMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese* (London, 1876), pp. 334 sq.

² T. C. Hodson, "The Genna amongst the Tribes of Assam," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxvi. (1906) p. 94.

³ Lieutenant Thomas Shaw, "On the Inhabitants of the Hills near Rajamahall," *Asiatic Researches*, Fourth Edition, iv. (1807) pp. 60-62.

the women will die in child-bed, and so forth. The guilty couple are taken by their clansmen to a priest and obliged to sacrifice a pig and a goat; after that they are made outcasts, for their offence is inexpiable.¹ The Orang Glai, a savage tribe in the mountains of Annam, similarly suppose that illicit love is punished by tigers, which devour the sinners. If a girl is found with child, her family offers a feast of pigs, fowls, and wine to appease the offended spirits.²

The Battas of Sumatra in like manner think that if an unmarried woman is with child, she must be given in marriage at once, even to a man of lower rank; for otherwise the people will be infested with tigers, and the crops in the fields will not be abundant. They also believe that the adultery of married women causes a plague of tigers, crocodiles, or other wild beasts. The crime of incest, in their opinion, would blast the whole harvest, if the wrong were not speedily repaired. Epidemics and other calamities that affect the whole people are almost always traced by them to incest, by which is to be understood any marriage that conflicts with their customs.³

Similar views prevail among many tribes in Borneo. Thus in regard to the Sea Dyaks we are told by Archdeacon Perham that "immorality among the unmarried is supposed to bring a plague of rain upon the earth, as a punishment inflicted by *Petara*. It must be atoned for with sacrifice and fine. In a function which is sometimes held to procure fine weather, the excessive rain is represented as the result of the immorality of two young people. *Petara* is invoked, the offenders are banished from their home, and the bad weather is said to cease. Every district traversed by an adulterer is believed to be accursed of the gods until the proper sacrifice has been offered."⁴ When rain pours down day after day and the

¹ Major P. R. T. Gurdon, *The Khasis* (London, 1907), pp. 94, 123.

² É. Aymonier, "Notes sur l'Annam," *Excursions et reconnaissances*, x. No. 24 (Saigon, 1885), pp. 308 sq.

³ J. B. Neumann, "Het Pane-en Bila-stroomgebied op het eiland Sumatra," *Tijdschrift van het Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, Tweede Serie, dl. iii., afdeeling, meer

uitgebreide artikelen, No. 3 (Amsterdam, 1886), pp. 514 sq.; M. Joustra, "Het leven, de zeden en gewoonten der Bataks," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, xlvi. (1902) p. 411.

⁴ Rev. J. Perham, "Petara, or Sea Dyak Gods," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 8, December 1881, p. 150; H. Ling

crops are rotting in the fields, these Dyaks come to the conclusion that some people have been secretly indulging in lusts of the flesh ; so the elders lay their heads together and adjudicate on all cases of incest and bigamy, and purify the earth with the blood of pigs, which appears to these savages, as sheep's blood appeared to the ancient Hebrews, to possess the valuable property of atoning for moral guilt. Not long ago the offenders, whose lewdness had thus brought the whole country into danger, would have been punished with death or at least slavery. A Dyak may not marry his first cousin unless he first performs a special ceremony called *bergaput* to avert evil consequences from the land. The couple repair to the water-side, fill a small pitcher with their personal ornaments, and sink it in the river ; or instead of a jar they fling a chopper and a plate into the water. A pig is then sacrificed on the bank, and its carcass, drained of blood, is thrown in after the jar. Next the pair are pushed into the water by their friends and ordered to bathe together. Lastly, a joint of bamboo is filled with pig's blood, and the couple perambulate the country and the villages round about, sprinkling the blood on the ground. After that they are free to marry. This is done, we are told, for the sake of the whole country, in order that the rice may not be blasted by the marriage of cousins.¹ Again, we are informed that the Sibuyaus, a Dyak tribe of Sarawak, are very careful of the honour of their daughters, because they imagine that if an unmarried girl is found to be with child it is offensive to the higher powers, who, instead of always chastising the culprits, punish the tribe by visiting its members with misfortunes. Hence when such a crime is detected they fine the lovers and sacrifice a pig to appease the angry powers and to avert the sickness or other calamities that might follow. Further, they inflict fines on the

Roth, *The Natives of Sarawak and British Borneo* (London, 1896), i. 180. *Petara* is the general Dyak name for deity. The common idea is that there are many *petaras*, indeed that every man has his own. The word is said to be derived from Sanscrit and to be etymologically identical with *Avatar*, the Dyaks

regularly substituting *p* or *b* for *v*. See Rev. J. Perham, *op. cit.* pp. 133 *sqq.*; H. Ling Roth's *Natives of Sarawak and British Borneo*, i. 168 *sqq.*

¹ H. Ling Roth, "Low's Natives of Borneo," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxi. (1892) pp. 113 *sq.*, 133; compare *id.*, *ibid.* xxii. (1893) p. 24.

families of the couple for any severe accident or death by drowning that may have happened at any time within a month before the religious atonement was made ; for they regard the families of the culprits as responsible for these mishaps. The fines imposed for serious or fatal accidents are heavy ; for simple wounds they are lighter. With the fear of these fines before their eyes parents keep a watchful eye on the conduct of their daughters. Among the Dyaks of the Batang Lupar river the chastity of the unmarried girls is not so strictly guarded ; but in respectable families, when a daughter proves frail, they sacrifice a pig and sprinkle its blood on the doors to wash away the sin.¹ The Hill Dyaks of Borneo abhor incest and do not allow the marriage even of cousins. In 1846 the Baddat Dyaks complained to Mr. Hugh Low that one of their chiefs had disturbed the peace and prosperity of the village by marrying his own granddaughter. Since that disastrous event, they said, no bright day had blessed their territory ; rain and darkness alone prevailed, and unless the plague-spot were removed, the tribe would soon be ruined. The old sinner was degraded from office, but apparently allowed to retain his wife ; and the domestic brawls between this ill-assorted couple gave much pain to the virtuous villagers.²

The Bahau, another tribe in the interior of Borneo, believe that adultery is punished by the spirits, who visit the whole tribe with failure of the crops and other misfortunes. Hence in order to avert these evil consequences from the innocent members of the tribe, the two culprits, with all their possessions, are first placed on a gravel bank in the middle of the river, in order to isolate or, in electrical language, to insulate them and so prevent the moral or rather physical infection from spreading. Then pigs and fowls are killed, and with the blood priestesses smear the property of the guilty pair in order to disinfect it. Finally, the two are placed on a raft, with sixteen eggs, and allowed to drift down stream. They may save themselves by plunging into the water and swimming ashore ; but this is

¹ Spenser St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, Second Edition (London, 1863), i. 63 sq.

² Hugh Low, *Sarawak* (London, 1848), pp. 300 sq.

perhaps a mitigation of an older sentence of death by drowning, for young people still shower long grass stalks, representing spears, at the shamefaced and dripping couple.¹ Certain it is, that some Dyak tribes used to punish incest by fastening the man and woman in separate baskets laden with stones and drowning them in the river. By incest they understood the cohabitation of parents with children, of brothers with sisters, and of uncles and aunts with nieces and nephews. A Dutch resident had much difficulty in saving the life of an uncle and niece who had married each other; finally he procured their banishment to a distant part of Borneo.² The Blu- u Kayans, another tribe in the interior of Borneo, believe that an intrigue between an unmarried pair is punished by the spirits with failure of the harvest, of the fishing, and of the hunt. Hence the delinquents have to appease the wrath of the spirits by sacrificing a pig and a certain quantity of rice.³ In Pasir, a district of Eastern Borneo, incest is thought to bring dearth, epidemics, and all sorts of evils on the land.⁴ In the island of Ceram a man convicted of unchastity has to smear every house in the village with the blood of a pig and a fowl: this is supposed to wipe out his guilt and ward off misfortunes from the village.⁵

Among the Macassars and Bugineese of Southern Celebes incest is a capital crime; but the blood of the guilty pair may not be shed, for the people think that, were the ground to be polluted by the blood of such criminals, the rivers would dry up and the supply of fish would run short, the harvest and the produce of the gardens would miscarry, edible fruits would fail, sickness would be rife among cattle and horses, civil strife would break out, and the country would suffer from other widespread calamities. Hence the punishment of the guilty is such as to avoid the spilling of their blood: usually they are tied up in a sack and thrown

¹ A. W. Nieuwenhuis, *Quer durch Borneo* (Leyden, 1904-1907), i. 367.

² M. T. H. Perelaer, *Ethnographische Beschrijving der Dajaks* (Zalt-Bommel, 1870), pp. 59 sq.

³ A. W. Nieuwenhuis, *Quer durch Borneo*, ii. 99.

⁴ A. H. F. J. Nusselein, "Beschrijving van het landschap Pasir," *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië*, lviii. (1905) p. 538.

⁵ A. Bastian, *Indonesien*, i. (Berlin, 1884) p. 144.

into the sea to drown. Yet they get on their journey to eternity the necessary provisions, consisting of a bag of rice, salt, dried fish, cocoa-nuts, and other things, among which three quids of betel are not forgotten.¹ We can now perhaps understand why the Romans used to sew up a parricide in a sack with a dog, a cock, a viper, and an ape for company, and fling him into the sea. They probably feared to defile the soil of Italy by spilling upon it the blood of such a miscreant.² Amongst the Tomori of Central Celebes a person guilty of incest is throttled; no drop of his blood may fall on the ground, for if it did, the rice would never grow again. The union of uncle with niece is regarded by these people as incest, but it can be expiated by an offering. A garment of the man and one of the woman are laid on a copper vessel; the blood of a sacrificed animal, either a goat or a fowl, is allowed to drip on the garments, and then the vessel with its contents is set floating down the river.³ Among the Tololaki, another tribe of Central Celebes, persons who have defiled themselves with incest are shut up in a basket and drowned. No drop of their blood may be spilt on the ground, for that would hinder the earth from ever bearing fruit again.⁴ When it rains in torrents, the Galelareese of Halmahera, another large East Indian island, say that brother and sister, or father and daughter, or in short some near kinsfolk are having illicit relations with each other, and that every human being must be informed of it, for then only will the rain cease to descend. The superstition has repeatedly caused blood relations to be accused, rightly or wrongly, of incest. Further, the people

¹ B. F. Matthes, "Over de *âdd's* of gewoonten der Makassaren en Boegineezen," *Verlagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Derde Reeks, ii. (Amsterdam, 1885) p. 182.

² *Digest*, xlvi. 9. 9, *Poena parricidii more majorum haec instituta est, ut parricida virgis sanguineis verberatus deinde culleo insuatur cum cane, gallo gallinaceo et vipera et simia: deinde in mare profundum culleus jactatur*. Compare Valerius Maximus, i. 1. 13; Professor J. E. B. Mayor's note on Juvenal,

viii. 214. If the view suggested above is correct, the scourging of the criminal to the effusion of blood (*virgis sanguineis verberatus*) must have been a later addition to the original penalty.

³ A. C. Kruijt, "Eenige aantekeningen omtrent de Toboengkoe en de Tomori," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, xlv. (1900) p. 235.

⁴ A. C. Kruijt, "Van Posso naar Mori," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, xlv. (1900) p. 162.

think that alarming natural phenomena, such as a violent earthquake or the eruption of a volcano, are caused by crimes of the same sort. Persons charged with such offences are brought to Ternate; it is said that formerly they were often drowned on the way or, on being haled hither, were condemned to be thrown into the volcano.¹ In the Banggai Archipelago, to the east of Celebes, earthquakes are explained as punishments inflicted by evil spirits for indulgence in illicit love.²

In some parts of Africa, also, it is believed that breaches of sexual morality disturb the course of nature, particularly by blighting the fruits of the earth; and probably such views are much more widely diffused in that continent than the scanty and fragmentary evidence at our disposal might lead us to suppose. Thus, the negroes of Loango, in West Africa, imagine that the commerce of a man with an immature girl is punished by God with drought and consequent famine until the transgressors expiate their transgression by dancing naked before the king and an assembly of the people, who throw hot gravel and bits of glass at the pair as they run the gauntlet. The rains in that country should fall in September, but in 1898 there was a long drought, and when the month of December had nearly passed, the sun-scorched stocks of the fruitless Indian corn shook their rustling leaves in the wind, the beans lay shrivelled and black on the ruddy soil, and the shoots of the sweet potato had flowered and withered long ago. The people cried out against their rulers for neglecting their duty to the primeval powers of the earth; the priests of the sacred groves had recourse to divination and discovered that God was angry with the land on account of the immorality of certain persons unknown, who were not observing the traditions and laws of their God and country. The feeble old king had fled, but the slave who acted as regent in his room sent word to the chiefs that there were people in their towns who were the cause of God's wrath. So every chief called his subjects together and caused enquiries to be made, and then it was

¹ M. J. van Baarda, "Fabelen, Verhalen en Overleveringen der Galelareezen," *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch*

Indië, xlv. (1895) p. 514.

² F. S. A. de Clerq, *Bijdragen tot de Kennis der Residentie Ternate* (Leyden, 1890), p. 132.

discovered that three girls had broken the customs of their country, for they were with child before they had passed through what is called the paint-house, that is, before they had been painted red and secluded for a season in token that they had attained to the age of puberty. The people were incensed and endeavoured to punish or even kill the three girls; and the English writer who has recorded the case has thought it worth while to add that on the very morning when the culprits were brought before the magistrate rain fell.¹ Amongst the Bavili of Loango, who are divided into totemic clans, no man is allowed to marry a woman of his mother's clan; and God is believed to punish a breach of this marriage law by withholding the rains in their due season.² Similar notions of the blighting influence of sexual crime appear to be entertained by the Nandi of British East Africa; for we are told that when a warrior has got a girl with child, she "is punished by being put in Coventry, none of her girl friends being allowed to speak to or look at her until after the child is born and buried. She is also regarded with contempt for the rest of her life and may never look inside a granary for fear of spoiling the corn."³ Among the Basutos in like manner "while the corn is exposed to view, all defiled persons are carefully kept from it. If the aid of a man in this state is necessary for carrying home the harvest, he remains at some distance while the sacks are filled, and only approaches to place them upon the draught oxen. He withdraws as soon as the load is deposited at the dwelling, and under no pretext can he assist in pouring the corn into the basket in which it is preserved."⁴ The nature of the defilement which thus disqualifies a man from handling the corn is not mentioned, but we may conjecture that unchastity would fall under this general head. For amongst the Basutos after a child is born a fresh fire has to be kindled in the dwelling by the friction of wood, and this

¹ Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique* (Amsterdam, 1686), p. 326; R. E. Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* (London, 1906), pp. 53, 67-71.

² R. E. Dennett, *op. cit.* p. 52.

³ A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi, their Language and Folk-lore* (Oxford, 1909), p. 76.

⁴ Rev. E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (London, 1861), p. 252.

must be done by a young man of chaste habits ; it is believed that an untimely death awaits him who should dare to discharge this holy office after having lost his innocence.¹

These examples suffice to prove that among many savage races breaches of the marriage laws are believed to draw down on the community public calamities of the most serious character, that in particular they are thought to blast the fruits of the earth through excessive rain or excessive drought. Traces of similar beliefs may perhaps be detected among the civilised races of antiquity. Thus among the Hebrews we read how Job, passionately protesting his innocence before God, declares that he is no adulterer ; “ For that,” says he, “ were an heinous crime ; yea it were an iniquity to be punished by the judges : for it is a fire that consumeth unto Destruction, and would root out all mine increase.”² In this passage the Hebrew word translated “ increase ” commonly means “ the produce of the earth ” ;³ and if we give the word its usual sense here, then Job affirms adultery to be destructive of the fruits of the ground, which is precisely what many savages still believe. This interpretation of his words is strongly confirmed by two narratives in Genesis, where we read how Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was taken by a king into his harem, and how thereafter God visited the king and his household with great plagues, especially by closing up the wombs of the king’s wife and his maid-servants so that they bare no children. It was not till the king had discovered and confessed his sin, and Abraham had prayed God to forgive him, that the king’s women again became fruitful.⁴ These narratives seem to imply that adultery, even when it is committed in ignorance, is a cause of plague and especially of

¹ Rev. E. Casalis, *The Basutos*, p. 267. The writer tells us (pp. 255 sq.) that “ death with all that immediately precedes or follows it, is in the eyes of these people the greatest of all defilements. Thus the sick, persons who have touched or buried a corpse, or who have dug the grave, individuals who inadvertently walk over or sit upon a grave, the near relatives of a person deceased, murderers, warriors who have

killed their enemies in battle, are all considered impure.” No doubt all such persons would also be prohibited from handling the corn.

² Job xxxi. 11 sq. (Revised Version).

³ תְּבוּאָה. See *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, by F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and Ch. A. Briggs (Oxford, 1906), p. 100.

⁴ Genesis xii. 10-20, xx. 1-18.

sterility among women. Again, in Leviticus, after a long list of sexual crimes, we read:¹ "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out from before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomiteth out her inhabitants." This passage seems to imply that the land itself was somehow physically affected by sexual transgressions in such a way that it could no longer support the inhabitants. Apparently the ancient Greeks entertained a similar view of the wasting effect of incest; for according to Sophocles the land of Thebes suffered from blight, pestilence, and the sterility both of women and cattle under the reign of Oedipus, who had unwittingly slain his father and married his mother; the country was emptied of its inhabitants, and the Delphic oracle declared that the only way to restore prosperity to it was to banish the sinner.² No doubt the poet and his hearers set down these public calamities in part to the guilt of parricide which rested on Oedipus; but probably they also laid much of the evil at the door of the incest which he had committed with his mother. In the reign of the emperor Claudius a Roman noble was accused of incest with his sister. He committed suicide, his sister was banished, and the emperor ordered that certain ancient ceremonies derived from the laws of King Servius Tullius should be performed, and that expiation should be made by the pontiffs at the sacred grove of Diana.³ As Diana appears to have been a goddess of fertility in general and of the fruitfulness of women in particular,⁴ the expiation for incest offered at her sanctuary may perhaps be accepted as evidence that the Romans, like other peoples, attributed to sexual immorality a tendency to blast the fruits both of the earth and of the womb. According to an ancient Irish legend Munster was afflicted in the third century of our era with a failure of the crops and other misfortunes. When the nobles enquired into the matter, they learned that these

¹ Leviticus xviii. 24 *sq.*

³ Tacitus, *Annals*, xii. 4 and 8.

² Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 22 *sqq.*, 95 *sqq.*

⁴ See my *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (London, 1905), pp. 13 *sqq.*, 17.

calamities were the result of an incest which the king had committed with his sister. In order to put an end to the evil they demanded of the king his two sons, the fruit of this unholy union, that they might consume them with fire and cast their ashes into the running stream.¹

Thus it appears that in the opinion of many peoples sexual irregularities, whether of the married or the unmarried, are not regarded merely as moral offences which affect only the few persons immediately concerned; they are believed to involve the whole people in danger and disaster either directly by a sort of magical influence or indirectly by rousing the wrath of gods to whom these acts are offensive. Nay they are often supposed to strike a blow at the very existence of the community by blighting the fruits of the earth and thereby cutting off the food supply. Wherever these superstitions prevail, it is obvious that public opinion and public justice will treat sexual offences with far greater severity than is meted out to them by peoples who, like most civilised nations, regard such misdemeanours as matters of private rather than of public concern, as sins rather than crimes, which may perhaps affect the eternal welfare of the individual sinner in a life hereafter, but which do not in any way imperil the temporal welfare of the innocent community as a whole. And conversely, wherever we find that incest, adultery, and fornication are treated by the community with extreme rigour, we may reasonably infer that the original motive for such treatment was superstition; in other words, that wherever a tribe or nation, not content with leaving these transgressions to be avenged by the injured parties, has itself punished them with exceptional severity, the reason for doing so has probably been a belief that the effect of all such delinquencies is to disturb the course of nature and thereby to endanger the whole people, who accordingly must protect themselves by effectually disarming and, if necessary, exterminating the delinquents. This may explain, for example, why the Indian Laws of Manu decreed that an adulteress should be

¹ G. Keating, *History of Ireland*, translated by J. O'Mahony (New York, 1857), pp. 337 sq.; P. W.

Joyce, *Social History of Ancient Ireland* (London, 1903), ii. 512 sq.

devoured by dogs in a public place and that an adulterer should be roasted to death on a red-hot iron bed ;¹ why the Babylonian code of Hammurabi sentenced an adulterous couple to be strangled and cast into the river ; why the same code punished incest with a mother by burning both the culprits ;² why the Mosaic law condemned the adulteress and her paramour to death ;³ and why among the Saxons, down to the days of St. Boniface, the maiden who had dishonoured her father's house, or the adulteress, was compelled to hang herself, was burned, and her paramour hung over the blazing pile, or she was scourged or cut to pieces with knives by all the women of the village till she was dead.⁴ Among the Nandi of British East Africa "incest, intercourse with a step-mother, step-daughter, cousin or other near relation, is punished by what is known as *injoket*. A crowd of people assemble outside the house of the culprit, who is dragged out, and the punishment is inflicted by the women, all of whom, both young and old, strip for the occasion. The man is flogged, his houses and crops destroyed, and some of his stock confiscated."⁵ Among the Baganda adultery was invariably punished by the death of both the delinquents: they were first put to horrible tortures to wring a confession from them and then killed.⁶ "The Hottentots," says an old writer, "allow not marriages between first or second cousins. They have a traditionary law, which ordains, that both man and woman, so near to each other in blood, who shall be convicted of joining together either in marriage or fornication, shall be cudgel'd to death. This law, they say, has prevail'd through all the generations of 'em ; and that they execute it at once, upon conviction, without any regard to wealth, power, or affinity."⁷ It is difficult to believe that in these and similar

¹ *Laws of Manu*, viii. 371 sq., translated by G. Bühler, pp. 318 sq. (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv.). Compare *Gautama*, xxiii. 14 sq., translated by G. Bühler, p. 285 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. ii.).

² *Code of Hammurabi*, §§ 129, 157, C. H. W. Johns, *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts and Letters* (Edinburgh, 1904), pp. 54, 56.

³ Deuteronomy xxii. 22.

⁴ H. H. Milman, *History of Latin Christianity*, ii. 54.

⁵ A. C. Hollis, *The Nandi, their Language and Folk-lore* (Oxford, 1909), p. 76.

⁶ Rev. J. Roscoe, "Further Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. (1902) p. 39.

⁷ Peter Kolben, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (London,

cases the community would inflict such severe punishment for sexual offences if it did not believe that its own safety, and not merely the interest of a few individuals, was imperilled thereby.

If now we ask why illicit relations between the sexes should be supposed to disturb the balance of nature and particularly to blast the fruits of the earth, a partial answer may be conjecturally suggested. It is not enough to say that such relations are displeasing to the gods, who punish indiscriminately the whole community for the sins of a few. For we must always bear in mind that the gods are creations of man's fancy; he fashions them in human likeness, and endows them with tastes and opinions which are merely vast cloudy projections of his own. To affirm, therefore, that something is a sin because God wills it so, is only to push the enquiry one stage farther back and to raise the further question, Why is God supposed to dislike and punish these particular acts? In the case with which we are here concerned the reason why so many savage gods prohibit adultery, fornication, and incest under pain of their severe displeasure may perhaps be found in the analogy which many savage men trace between the reproduction of the human species and the reproduction of animals and plants. The analogy is not purely fanciful, on the contrary it is real and vital; but primitive peoples have given it a false extension in a vain attempt to apply it practically to increasing the food supply. They have imagined, in fact, that by performing or abstaining from certain sexual acts they thereby directly promoted the reproduction of animals and the multiplication of plants.¹ All such acts and abstinences, it

1738), i. 157. For many more examples of the death penalty and other severe punishments inflicted for sexual offences, see E. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, ii. (London, 1908) pp. 366 sqq., 425 sqq.

¹ For examples of the attempt to multiply edible plants in this fashion, see *The Golden Bough*, Second Edition, ii. 204 sqq. The reported examples of similar attempts to assist the multiplication of animals seem to be rarer.

For some instances see George Catlin, *O-Kee-Pa, a Religious Ceremony and other Customs of the Mandans* (London, 1867), Folium Reservatum, pp. i.-iii. (multiplication of buffaloes); *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark to the Sources of the Missouri* (London, 1905), i. 209 sq. (multiplication or attraction of buffaloes); Maximilian Prinz zu Wied, *Reise in das innere Nord-America* (Coblentz, 1839-1841), ii. 181, 263-267 (multiplication or

is obvious, are purely superstitious and wholly fail to effect the desired result. They are not religious but magical; that is, they compass their end, not by an appeal to the gods, but by manipulating natural forces in accordance with certain false ideas of physical causation. In the present case the principle on which savages seek to propagate animals and plants is that of magical sympathy or imitation: they fancy that they assist the reproductive process in nature by mimicking or performing it among themselves. Now in the evolution of society such efforts to control the course of nature directly by means of magical rites appear to have preceded the efforts to control it indirectly by appealing to the vanity and cupidity, the good-nature and pity of the gods; in short, magic seems to be older than religion.¹ In most races, it is true, the epoch of unadulterated magic, of magic untinged by religion, belongs to such a remote past that its existence, like that of our ape-like ancestors, can be a matter of inference only; almost everywhere in history and the world we find magic and religion side by side, at one time allies, at another enemies, now playing into each other's hands, now cursing, objurgating, and vainly attempting to exterminate one another. On the whole the lower intelligences cling closely, though secretly, to magic, while the higher intelligences have discerned the vanity of its pretensions and turned to religion instead. The result has been that beliefs and rites which were purely magical in origin often contract in course of time a religious character; they are modified in accordance with the advance of thought, they are translated into terms of gods and spirits, whether good and beneficent, or evil and malignant. We may surmise, though we cannot prove, that a change of this sort has come over the minds of many races with regard to sexual morality. At some former time,

attraction of buffaloes); *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, v. (1904), p. 271 (multiplication of turtles); J. Roscoe, "Further Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. (1902) p. 53 (multiplication of edible green locusts); S. Gason, in

Journal of the Anthropological Institute, xxiv. (1895) p. 174 (multiplication of edible rats); *id.* "The Dieyerie Tribe," in *Native Tribes of South Australia* (Adelaide, 1879), p. 280 (multiplication of dogs and snakes).

¹ I have give my reasons for thinking so elsewhere (*The Golden Bough*, Second Edition, i. 69 *sqq.*).

perhaps, straining a real analogy too far, they believed that those relations of the human sexes which for any reason they regarded as right and natural had a tendency to promote sympathetically the propagation of animals and plants and thereby to ensure a supply of food for the community; while on the contrary they may have imagined that those relations of the human sexes which for any reason they deemed wrong and unnatural had a tendency to thwart and impede the propagation of animals and plants and thereby to diminish the common supply of food. Such a belief, it is obvious, would furnish a sufficient motive for the strict prohibition of what were deemed improper relations between men and women; and it would explain the deep horror and detestation with which sexual irregularities are viewed by many, though certainly not by all, savage tribes. For if improper relations between the human sexes prevent animals and plants from multiplying, they strike a fatal blow at the existence of the tribe by cutting off its supply of food at the roots. No wonder, therefore, that wherever such superstitions have prevailed the whole community, believing its very existence to be put in jeopardy by sexual immorality, should turn savagely on the culprits, and beat, burn, drown or otherwise exterminate them in order to rid itself of so dangerous a pollution. And when with the advance of knowledge men began to perceive the mistake they had made in imagining that the commerce of the human sexes could affect the propagation of animals and plants, they would still through long habit be so inured to the idea of the wickedness of certain sexual relations that they could not dismiss it from their minds, even when they discerned the fallacious nature of the reasoning by which they had arrived at it. The old practice would therefore stand, though the old theory had fallen: the old rules of sexual morality would continue to be observed, but if they were to retain the respect of the community, it was necessary to place them on a new theoretical basis. That basis, in accordance with the general advance of thought, was supplied by religion. Sexual relations which had once been condemned as wrong and unnatural because they were supposed to thwart the

natural multiplication of animals and plants and thereby to diminish the food supply, would now be condemned because it was imagined that they were displeasing to gods or spirits, those stalking-horses which savage man rigs out in the cast-off clothes of his still more savage ancestors. The moral practice would therefore remain the same, though its theoretical basis had been shifted from magic to religion. In this or some such way as this we may conjecture that the Karens, Dyaks, and other savages reached those curious conceptions of sexual immorality and its consequences which we have been considering. But from the nature of the case the development of moral theory which I have sketched is purely hypothetical and hardly admits of verification.

However, even if we assume for a moment that the savages in question reached their present view of sexual immorality in the way I have surmised, there remains behind all the question, How did they originally come to regard certain relations of the sexes as immoral? For clearly the notion that such immorality interferes with the course of nature must have been secondary and derivative: people must on independent grounds have concluded that certain relations between men and women were wrong and injurious before they extended the conclusion by false analogy to nature. The question brings us face to face with the deepest and darkest problem in the history of society, the problem of the origin of the laws which still regulate marriage and the relations of the sexes among civilised nations; for broadly speaking the fundamental laws which we recognise in these matters are recognised also by savages, with this difference, that among many savages the sexual prohibitions are far more numerous, the horror excited by breaches of them far deeper, and the punishment inflicted on the offenders far sterner than with us. The problem has often been attacked, but never solved. Perhaps it is destined, like so many riddles of that Sphinx which we call nature, to remain for ever insoluble. At all events this is not the place to broach so intricate and profound a discussion. I return to my immediate subject.

In the opinion of many savages the effect of sexual

immorality is not merely to disturb, directly or indirectly, the course of nature by blighting the crops, causing the earth to quake, volcanoes to vomit fire, and so forth: the delinquents themselves, their offspring, or their innocent spouses are supposed to suffer in their own persons for the sin that has been committed. Thus the Baganda of Central Africa believe that if a wife who is with child by her husband commits adultery she will either die in childbed or go mad and attempt to kill and devour her offspring. Further, they think that if, after the child is born and before it is named, either husband or wife proves unfaithful to the other, their child will die, unless the medicine-man saves its life by a magical ceremony. Since death in child-bed is regarded by these people as a sure proof that the woman had been guilty of adultery, the unfortunate husband who loses his wife in this way is fined by her family for his culpable negligence in allowing her to go astray with another man and so to incur the fatal consequences of her sin.¹ Again, it appears to be a common notion with savages that the infidelity of a wife prevents her husband from killing game and even exposes him to imminent risk of being himself killed or wounded by wild beasts. This belief is entertained by the Wagogo and other peoples of East Africa, by the Moxos Indians of Bolivia, and by Aleutian hunters of sea-otters. In such cases any mishap that befalls the husband during the chase is set down by him to the score of his wife's misconduct at home; he returns in wrath and visits his ill-luck on the often innocent object of his suspicions even, it may be, to the shedding of her blood.² While the Huichol Indians of Mexico are away seeking for a species of cactus which they regard as sacred, their women at home are bound to be strictly chaste; otherwise they believe that they would be visited with illness and would endanger the success of the men's expedition.³ An old writer on Madagascar tells us

¹ Rev. J. Roscoe, "Further Notes on the Manners and Customs of the Baganda," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. (1902) p. 39.

² P. Reichard, *Deutsch Ostafrika* (Leipsic, 1892), p. 427; H. Cole, "Notes on the Wagogo of German East Africa," *Journal of the Anthro-*

logical Institute, xxxii. (1902) pp. 318 sq.; A. D'Orbigny, *Voyage dans l'Amérique méridionale*, iii. Part i. p. 226; J. Petroff, *Report on the Population, Industries, and Resources of Alaska*, p. 155.

³ C. Lumholtz, *Unknown Mexico* (London, 1903), ii. 128 sq.

that though Malagasy women are voluptuous they will not allow themselves to be drawn into an intrigue while their husbands are absent at the wars, for they believe that infidelity at such a time would cause the absent spouse to be wounded or slain.¹ If only King David had held this belief he might have contented himself with a single instead of a double crime, and need not have sent his Machiavellian order to put the injured husband in the forefront of the battle.² The Zulus imagine that an unfaithful wife who touches her husband's furniture without first eating certain herbs causes him to be seized with a fit of coughing of which he soon dies. Moreover, among the Zulus "a man who has had criminal intercourse with a sick person's wife is prohibited from visiting the sick-chamber; and, if the sick person is a woman, any female who has committed adultery with her husband must not visit her. They say that, if these visits ever take place, the patient is immediately oppressed with a cold perspiration and dies. This prohibition was thought to find out the infidelities of the women and to make them fear discovery."³ For a similar reason, apparently, during the sickness of a Caffre chief his tribe was bound to observe strict continence under pain of death.⁴ The notion seems to have been that any act of incontinence would through some sort of magical sympathy prove fatal to the sick chief. Similarly, in the kingdom of Congo, when the sacred pontiff called the Chitomé was going his rounds throughout the country, all his subjects had to live strictly chaste, and any person found guilty of incontinence at such times was put to death without mercy. They thought that universal chastity was essential to the preservation of the life of the pontiff, whom they revered as the head of their religion and their common father. Accordingly when he was abroad he took care to warn his faithful

¹ De Flacourt, *Histoire de la Grande Isle Madagascar* (Paris, 1658), pp. 97 sq. Compare John Struys, *Voyages and Travels* (London, 1684), p. 22; Abbé Rochon, *Voyage to Madagascar and the East Indies*, translated from the French (London, 1792), pp. 46 sq.

² 2 Samuel xi.

³ "Mr. Farewell's Account of Chaka, the King of Natal," Appendix to W. F. W. Owen's *Narrative of Voyages to explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar* (London, 1833), ii. 395.

⁴ L. Alberti, *De Kaffers* (Amsterdam, 1810), p. 171.

subjects by a public crier, that no man might plead ignorance as an excuse for a breach of the law.¹

Speaking of the same region of West Africa, an old writer tells us that "conjugal chastity is singularly respected among these people; adultery is placed in the list of the greatest crimes. By an opinion generally received, the women are persuaded that if they were to render themselves guilty of infidelity, the greatest misfortunes would overwhelm them, unless they averted them by an avowal made to their husbands, and in obtaining their pardon for the injury they might have done."² Amongst the Sulka of New Britain unmarried people who have been guilty of unchastity are believed to contract thereby a fatal pollution (*sle*) of which they will die, if they do not confess their fault and undergo a public ceremony of purification. Such persons are avoided: no one will take anything at their hands: parents point them out to their children and warn them not to go near them. The infection which they are supposed to spread is apparently physical rather than moral in its nature; for special care is taken to keep the paraphernalia of the dance out of their way, the mere presence of persons so polluted being thought to tarnish the paint on the instruments. Men who have contracted this dangerous taint rid themselves of it by drinking sea-water mixed with shredded cocoa-nut and ginger, after which they are thrown into the sea. Emerging from the water they put off the dripping clothes which they wore during their state of defilement and throw them away. This purification is believed to save their lives, which otherwise must have been destroyed by their unchastity.³

These examples may suffice to shew that among many

¹ J. B. Labat, *Relation historique de l'Éthiopie occidentale* (Paris, 1732), i. 259 sq.

² Proyard, "History of Loango, Kakongo, and other Kingdoms in Africa," in Pinkerton's *Voyages and Travels*, xvi. 569.

³ P. Rascher, M.S.C., "Die Sulka, ein Beitrag zur Ethnographie Neu-Pommern," *Archiv für Anthropologie*, xxix. (1904) p. 211; R. Parkinson, *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee* (Stuttgart, 1907), pp. 179 sq. In the East

Indian island of Buru a man's death is sometimes supposed to be due to the adultery of his wife; but apparently the notion is that the death is brought about rather by the evil magic of the adulterer than by the act of adultery itself. See J. H. W. van der Miesen, "Een en ander over Boeroe, inzonderheit wat betreft het distrikt Waisama, gelegen aan de Z.O. Kust," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, xlvi. (1902) pp. 451-454.

racess sexual immorality, whether in the form of adultery, fornication, or incest, is believed of itself to entail, naturally and inevitably, without the intervention of society, most serious consequences not only on the culprits themselves, but also on the community, often indeed to menace the very existence of the whole people by destroying the food supply. I need hardly remind you that all these beliefs are entirely baseless ; no such consequences flow from such acts ; in short, the beliefs in question are a pure superstition. Yet we cannot doubt that wherever this superstition has existed it must have served as a powerful motive to deter men from adultery, fornication, and incest. If that is so, then I think I have proved my third proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for marriage, and has thereby contributed to the stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the unmarried.

V

RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE

I PASS now to my fourth and last proposition, which is, that among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for human life and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

The particular superstition which has had this salutary effect is the fear of ghosts, especially the ghosts of the murdered. The fear of ghosts is widespread, perhaps universal, among savages; it is hardly extinct among ourselves. If it were extinct, some learned societies might put up their shutters. Dead or alive, the fear of ghosts has certainly not been an unmixed blessing. Indeed it might with some show of reason be maintained that no belief has done so much to retard the economic and thereby the social progress of mankind as the belief in the immortality of the soul; for this belief has led race after race, generation after generation, to sacrifice the real wants of the living to the imaginary wants of the dead. The waste and destruction of life and property which this faith has entailed are enormous and incalculable. But I am not here concerned with the disastrous and deplorable consequences, the unspeakable follies and crimes and miseries, which have flowed in practice from the theory of a future life. My business at present is with the more cheerful side of a gloomy subject, with the wholesome, though groundless, terror which ghosts, apparitions, and spectres strike into the breasts of hardened ruffians and desperadoes. So far as such persons reflect at all and regulate their passions by the dictates of prudence, it seems plain that a fear of ghostly retribution,

of the angry spirit of their victim, must act as a salutary restraint on their disorderly impulses; it must reinforce the dread of purely secular punishment and furnish the choleric and malicious with a fresh motive for pausing before they imbrue their hands in blood. This is so obvious, and the fear of ghosts is so notorious, that both might perhaps be taken for granted, especially at this late hour of the evening. But for the sake of completeness I will mention a few illustrative facts, taking them almost at random from distant races in order to indicate the wide diffusion of this particular superstition. I shall try to shew that while all ghosts are feared, the ghosts of slain men are especially dreaded by their slayers.

The ancient Greeks believed that the soul of any man who had just been killed was angry with his slayer and troubled him; hence even an involuntary homicide had to depart from his country for a year until the wrath of the dead man had cooled down; nor might the slayer return until sacrifice had been offered and ceremonies of purification performed. If his victim chanced to be a foreigner, the homicide had to shun the country of the dead man as well as his own.¹ The legend of the matricide Orestes, how he roamed from place to place pursued and maddened by the ghost of his murdered mother, reflects faithfully the ancient Greek conception of the fate which overtakes the murderer at the hands of the ghost.²

But it is important to observe that not only does the hag-ridden homicide go in terror of his victim's ghost; he is himself an object of fear and aversion to the whole community on account of the angry and dangerous spirit which dogs his steps. It was probably more in self-defence than out of consideration for the manslayer that Attic law compelled him to quit the country. This comes out clearly from the provisions of the law. For in the first place, on going into banishment the homicide had to follow a prescribed road:³ clearly it would have been hazardous to let him stray about the country with a wrathful ghost at his heels. In the second place, if

¹ Plato, *Laws*, ix. 8, pp. 865 D-866 A; Demosthenes, xxiii. pp. 643 sq.; Hesychius, s.v. ἀπειναντισμός.

² Aeschylus, *Choëphor.* 1021 sqq.,

Eumenides, 85 sqq.; Euripides, *Iphig. in Taur.* 940 sqq.; Pausanias, ii. 31. 8, viii. 34. 1-4.

³ Demosthenes, xxiii. pp. 643 sq.

another charge was brought against a banished homicide, he was allowed to return to Attica to plead in his defence, but he might not set foot on land ; he had to speak from a ship, and even the ship might not cast anchor or put out a gangway. The judges avoided all contact with the culprit, for they judged the case sitting or standing on the shore.¹ Obviously the intention of this rule was literally to insulate the slayer, lest by touching Attic earth even indirectly through the anchor or the gangway he should blast it by a sort of electric shock, as we might say ; though doubtless the Greeks would have said that the blight was wrought by contact with the ghost, by a sort of effluence of death. For the same reason if such a man, sailing the sea, happened to be wrecked on the coast of the country where his crime had been committed, he was allowed to camp on the shore till a ship came to take him off, but he was expected to keep his feet in sea-water all the time,² evidently to neutralise the ghostly infection and prevent it from spreading to the soil. For the same reason, when the turbulent people of Cynaetha in Arcadia had perpetrated a peculiarly atrocious massacre and had sent envoys to Sparta, all the Arcadian states through which the envoys took their way ordered them out of the country ; and after their departure the Mantineans purified themselves and their belongings by sacrificing victims and carrying them round the city and the whole of their land.³ So when the Athenians had heard of a massacre at Argos, they caused purificatory offerings to be carried round the public assembly.⁴

No doubt the root of all such observances was a fear of the dangerous ghost which haunts the murderer and against which the whole community as well as the homicide himself must be on its guard. The Greek practice in these respects is clearly mirrored in the legend of Orestes ; for it is said that the people of Troezen would not receive him in their houses until he had been purified of his guilt,⁵ that is, until he had

¹ Demosthenes, xxiii. pp. 645 *sq.* ; Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 57 ; Pausanias, i. 28. 11 ; Pollux, viii. 120 ; Helladius, quoted by Photius, *Bibliotheca*, p. 535 A, lines 28 *sqq.* ed. I. Bekker.

² Plato, *Laws*, ix. 8. p. 866 c d.

³ Polybius, iv. 17-21.

⁴ Plutarch, *Praecept. ger. reipub.* xvii. 9.

⁵ Pausanias, ii. 31. 8.

been rid of his mother's ghost. The Greek mode of purifying a homicide was to kill a sucking pig and wash the hands of the guilty man in its blood: until this ceremony had been performed the manslayer was not allowed to speak.¹ Among the hill-tribes near Rajamahall in Bengal, if two men quarrel and blood be shed, the one who cut the other is fined a hog or a fowl, "the blood of which is sprinkled over the wounded person, to purify him, and to prevent his being possessed by a devil."² In this case the blood-sprinkling is avowedly intended to prevent the man from being haunted by a spirit; only it is not the aggressor but his victim who is supposed to be in danger and therefore to stand in need of purification. We have seen that among these and other savage tribes pig's blood is sprinkled on persons and things as a mode of purifying them from the pollution of sexual crimes.³ Among the Cameroon negroes in West Africa accidental homicide can be expiated by the blood of an animal. The relations of the slayer and of the slain assemble. An animal is killed, and every person present is smeared with its blood on his face and breast. They think that the guilt of manslaughter is thus atoned for, and that no punishment will overtake the homicide.⁴ In Car Nicobar a man possessed by devils is cleansed of them by being rubbed all over with pig's blood and beaten with leaves. The devils are supposed to be thus swept off like flies from the man's body to the leaves, which are then folded up and tied tightly with a special kind of string. A professional exorciser administers the beating, and at every stroke with the leaves he falls down with his face on the floor and calls out in a squeaky voice, "Here is a devil." This ceremony is performed by night; and before daybreak all the packets of leaves

¹ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 280 *sqq.*, 448 *sqq.*; *id.* quoted by Eustathius on Homer, *Iliad*, xix. 254, p. 1183, ἐπιτήδειος ἐδόκει πρὸς καθαρμὸν ὁ σὺς, ὡς δηλοῦ Αἰσχύλος ἐν τῷ, πρὶν ἂν παλαγμοῖς αἵματος χοιροκτόνου αὐτὸς σε χρᾶναι Ζεὺς καταστάξας χεροῖν; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonaut.* iv. 703-717, with the notes of the scholiast. Purifications of this sort are represented in Greek art. See my note on Pausanias ii.

31. 8 (vol. iii. 276 *sqq.*).

² Lieutenant Thomas Shaw, "The Inhabitants of the Hills near Rajamahall," *Asiatic Researches*, Fourth Edition, iv. (London, 1807), p. 78, compare p. 77.

³ See above, pp. 32, 34, 35, 36.

⁴ Missionary Autenrieth, "Zur Religion der Kamerun-Neger," *Mitteilungen der geographischen Gesellschaft zu Jena*, xii. (1893) pp. 93 *sq.*

containing the devils are thrown into the sea.¹ The Greeks similarly used laurel leaves as well as pig's blood in purificatory ceremonies.² In all such cases we may assume that the purification was originally conceived as physical rather than as moral, as a sort of detergent which washed, swept, or scraped the ghostly or demoniacal pollution from the person of the ghost-haunted or demon-possessed man. The motive for employing blood in these rites of cleansing is not clear. Perhaps the purgative virtue ascribed to it may have been based on the notion that the offended spirit accepts the blood as a substitute for the blood of the man or woman.³ However, it is doubtful whether this explanation could cover all the cases in which blood is sprinkled as a mode of purification. Certainly it is odd, as the sage Heraclitus long ago remarked, that blood-stains should be thought to be removed by blood-stains, as if a man who had been bespattered with mud should think to cleanse himself by bespattering himself with more mud.⁴ But the ways of man are wonderful and sometimes past finding out.

There was a curious story that after Orestes had gone mad through murdering his mother he recovered his wits by biting off one of his own fingers; the Furies of his murdered mother, which had appeared black to him before, appeared white as soon as he had mutilated himself in this way: it was as if the taste of his own blood sufficed to avert or disarm the wrathful ghost.⁵ A hint of the way in which the blood may have been supposed to produce this result is furnished by the practice of some savages. The Indians of Guiana believe that an avenger of blood who has slain his man must go mad unless he tastes the blood of his victim; the notion apparently is that the ghost drives him crazy, just as the ghost of Clytemnestra did to Orestes, who was also, be it remembered, an avenger of blood. In order to avert this consequence the Indian man-slayer resorts on the

¹ V. Solomon, "Extracts from Diaries kept in Car Nicobar," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxii. (1902) p. 227.

² See my note on Pausanias, ii. 31. 8 (vol. iii. pp. 276 *sqq.*).

³ This was the view of C. Meiners (*Geschichte der Religionen*, ii. 137 *sq.*),

and of E. Rohde (*Psyche*,³ ii. 77 *sq.*).

⁴ καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλως αἵματι μαινώμενοι οἷον εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῶ ἀπονίξοιτο, Heraclitus, in H. Diels's *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, zweite Auflage, i. (Berlin, 1906) p. 62.

⁵ Pausanias, viii. 34. 3.

third night to the grave of his victim, pierces the corpse with a sharp-pointed stick, and withdrawing it sucks the blood of the murdered man. After that he goes home with an easy mind, satisfied that he has done his duty and that he has nothing more to fear from the ghost.¹ A similar custom was observed by the Maoris in battle. When a warrior had slain his foe in combat, he tasted his blood, believing that this preserved him from the avenging spirit (*atua*) of his victim; for they imagined that "the moment a slayer had tasted the blood of the slain, the dead man became a part of his being and placed him under the protection of the *atua* or guardian-spirit of the deceased."² Thus in the opinion of these savages, by swallowing a portion of their victim they made him a part of themselves and thereby converted him from an enemy into an ally; they established, in the strictest sense of the words, a blood-covenant with him. Some of the North American Indians also drank the blood of their enemies in battle. A traveller, who witnessed the return of a war-party of the Aricara Indians, says: "Many of them had the mark which indicates that they had drank the blood of an enemy. This mark is made by rubbing the hand all over with vermilion, and by laying it on the mouth, it leaves a complete impression on the face, which is designed to resemble and indicate a bloody hand."³ The motive for this practice is not mentioned, but it may very well have been the same as with the Maoris, a desire to appropriate and so disarm the ghost of an enemy. Strange as it may seem, this truly savage superstition exists apparently in Italy to this day. There is a widespread opinion in Calabria that if a murderer is to escape he must suck his victim's blood from the reeking blade of the dagger with which he did the deed.⁴ We can now perhaps understand why the matricide Orestes was thought to have recovered his wandering wits as soon as he

¹ Rev. J. H. Bernau, *Missionary Labours in British Guiana* (London, 1847), pp. 57 sq.

² J. Dumont D'Urville, *Voyage autour du monde et à la recherche de la Pérouse*, iii. 305.

³ John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America* (Liverpool, 1817), p. 160.

⁴ Vincenzo Dorsa, *La Tradizione greco-latina negli usi e nelle credenze popolari della Calabria Citeriore* (Cosenza, 1884), p. 138.

had bitten off one of his fingers. By tasting his own blood, which was also that of his victim, since she was his mother, he might be supposed to form a blood-covenant with the ghost and so to convert it from a foe into a friend. The Kabyles of North Africa think that if a murderer leaps seven times over his victim's grave within three or seven days of the murder, he will be quite safe. Hence the fresh grave of a murdered man is carefully guarded.¹

That the Greek practice of secluding and purifying a homicide was essentially an exorcism, in other words, that its aim was to ban the dangerous ghost of his victim, is rendered practically certain by the similar rites of seclusion and purification which among many savage tribes have to be observed by victorious warriors with the avowed intention of securing them against the spirits of the men whom they have slain in battle. These rites I have illustrated elsewhere,² but a few cases may be quoted here by way of example. Thus among the Basutos "ablution is especially performed on return from battle. It is absolutely necessary that the warriors should rid themselves, as soon as possible, of the blood they have shed, or the shades of their victims would pursue them incessantly, and disturb their slumbers. They go in a procession, and in full armour, to the nearest stream. At the moment they enter the water a diviner, placed higher up, throws some purifying substance into the current."³ According to another account of the Basuto custom, "warriors who have killed an enemy are purified. The chief has to wash them, sacrificing an ox in the presence of the whole army. They are also anointed with the gall of the animal, which prevents the ghost of the enemy from pursuing them any farther."⁴ Among the Bantu tribes of Kavirondo, in British East Africa, when a man has killed an enemy in warfare he shaves his head on his return home, and his friends rub a medicine, which generally consists of cow's dung, over his body to prevent the spirit of the slain man

¹ J. Liorel, *Kabylie du Jurjura* (Paris, n.d.), p. 441.

² *The Golden Bough*, Second Edition, i. 331 sqq. More evidence will be adduced in the third edition of that work.

³ Rev. E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (London, 1861), p. 258.

⁴ Father Porte, "Les Rémiscences d'un missionnaire du Basutoland," *Les Missions catholiques*, xxviii. (1896) p. 371.

from troubling him.¹ Here cow's dung serves these negroes as a detergent of the ghost, just as pig's blood served the ancient Greeks. With the Ja-Luo of Kavirondo the custom is somewhat different. Three days after his return from the fight the warrior shaves his head. But before he may enter his village he has to hang a live fowl, head uppermost, round his neck; then the bird is decapitated and its head left hanging round his neck. Soon after his return a feast is made for the slain man, in order that his ghost may not haunt his slayer.² In these two last cases the slayer shaves his head, precisely as the matricide Orestes is said to have shorn his hair when he came to his senses.³ From this Greek tradition we may infer with some probability that the hair of Greek homicides, like that of these African warriors, was regularly cropped as one way of ridding them of the ghostly infection. Among the Ba-Yaka, a Bantu people of the Congo Free State, "a man who has been killed in battle is supposed to send his soul to avenge his death on the person of the man who killed him; the latter, however, can escape the vengeance of the dead by wearing the red tail-feathers of the parrot in his hair, and painting his forehead red."⁴ Perhaps, as I have suggested elsewhere, this costume is intended to disguise the slayer from his victim's ghost.⁵ Among the Natchez Indians of North America young braves who had taken their first scalps were obliged to observe certain rules of abstinence for six months. They might not sleep with their wives nor eat flesh; their only food was fish and haſty-pudding. If they broke these rules they believed that the soul of the man they had killed would work their death by magic.⁶ Among the tribes at the mouth of the Wanigela River, in British New Guinea, "a man who

¹ Sir H. Johnston, *The Uganda Protectorate* (London, 1902), ii. 743 sq.; C. W. Hobley, *Eastern Uganda* (London, 1902), p. 20.

² Sir H. Johnston, *op. cit.* ii. 794; C. W. Hobley, *op. cit.* p. 31.

³ Pausanias, viii. 34. 3; compare Strabo, xii. 2. 3, p. 535.

⁴ E. Torday and T. A. Joyce, "Notes on the Ethnography of the Ba-Yaka," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxxvi. (1906) pp. 50 sq.

⁵ J. G. Frazer, "Folk-lore in the Old Testament," in *Anthropological Essays presented to E. B. Tylor* (Oxford, 1907), p. 108.

⁶ "Relation des Natchez," *Recueil de voyages au nord*, ix. 24 (Amsterdam, 1737); *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, Nouvelle Édition, vii. (Paris, 1781) p. 26; Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1744), vi. 186 sq.

has taken life is considered to be impure until he has undergone certain ceremonies: as soon as possible after the deed he cleanses himself and his weapon. This satisfactorily accomplished, he repairs to his village and seats himself on the logs of sacrificial staging. No one approaches him or takes any notice whatever of him. A house is prepared for him which is put in charge of two or three small boys as servants. He may eat only toasted bananas, and only the centre portion of them—the ends being thrown away. On the third day of his seclusion a small feast is prepared by his friends, who also fashion some new perineal bands for him. This is called *ivi poro*. The next day the man dons all his best ornaments and badges for taking life, and sallies forth fully armed and parades the village. The next day a hunt is organised, and a kangaroo selected from the game captured. It is cut open and the spleen and liver rubbed over the back of the man. He then walks solemnly down to the nearest water, and standing straddle-legs in it washes himself. All young untried warriors swim between his legs. This is supposed to impart his courage and strength to them. The following day, at early dawn, he dashes out of his house, fully armed, and calls aloud the name of his victim. Having satisfied himself that he has thoroughly scared the ghost of the dead man, he returns to his house. The beating of flooring boards and the lighting of fires is also a certain method of scaring the ghost. A day later his purification is finished. He can then enter his wife's house."¹ In this last case the true nature of such so-called purifications is clearly manifest: they are in fact rites of exorcism observed for the purpose of banning a dangerous spirit.

Amongst the Omaha Indians of North America a murderer whose life was spared by the kinsmen of his victim had to observe certain stringent rules for a period which varied from two to four years. He must walk bare-foot, and he might eat no warm food, nor raise his voice, nor look around. He had to pull his robe around him and to keep it tied at the neck, even in warm weather; he

¹ R. E. Guise, "On the Tribes inhabiting the mouth of the Wanigela River, New Guinea," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xxviii. (1898) pp. 213 sq.

might not let it hang loose or fly open. He might not move his hands about, but had to keep them close to his body. He might not comb his hair, nor might it be blown about by the wind. No one would eat with him, and only one of his kindred was allowed to remain with him in his tent. When the tribe went hunting, he was obliged to pitch his tent about a quarter of a mile from the rest of the people, "lest the ghost of his victim should raise a high wind which might cause damage."¹ The reason here alleged for banishing the murderer from the camp of the hunters gives the clue to all the other restrictions laid on him: he was haunted by the ghost and therefore dangerous; hence people kept aloof from him, just as they are said to have done from the ghost-ridden Orestes. While the spirit of a murdered man is thus feared by everybody, it is natural that it should be specially dreaded by those against whom for any reason he may be conceived to bear a grudge. For example, among the Yabim of German New Guinea, when the relations of a murdered man have accepted a bloodwit instead of avenging his death, they must allow the family of the victim to mark them with chalk on the brow. Were this not done, the ghost of their dead kinsman might come and trouble them for not doing their duty by him; he might drive away their pigs or loosen their teeth.²

Indeed the ghosts of all who have died a violent death are in a sense a public danger; for their temper is naturally soured and they are apt to fall foul of the first person they meet without nicely discriminating between the innocent and the guilty. The Karens of Burma, for example, think that the spirits of all such persons go neither to the upper regions of bliss nor to the nether world of woe, but linger on earth and wander about invisible. They make men sick to death by stealing their souls. Accordingly these vampire-like beings are exceedingly dreaded by the people, who seek to appease their anger and repel their cruel assaults

¹ Rev. J. Owen Dorsey, "Omaha Sociology," *Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington, 1884), p. 369.

² K. Vetter, "Über papuanische Rechtsverhältnisse, wie solche nament-

lich bei den Jabim beobachtet wurden," *Nachrichten über Kaiser Wilhelms-Land und den Bismarck-Archipel*, 1897, p. 99; B. Hagen, *Unter den Papuas* (Wiesbaden, 1899), p. 254.

by propitiatory offerings and the most earnest prayers and supplications.¹ They put red, yellow, and white rice in a basket and leave it in the forest, saying: "Ghosts of such as died by falling from a tree, ghosts of such as died of hunger or thirst, ghosts of such as died by the tiger's tooth or the serpent's fang, ghosts of the murdered dead, ghosts of such as died of small-pox or cholera, ghosts of dead lepers, O ill-treat us not, seize not upon our persons, do us no harm. O stay here in this wood. We will bring hither red rice, yellow rice, and white rice for your subsistence."²

However, it is not always by fair words and propitiatory offerings that the community attempts to rid itself of these invisible but dangerous intruders. People sometimes resort to more forcible measures. "Once," says a traveller among the Indians of North America, "on approaching in the night a village of Ottawas, I found all the inhabitants in confusion: they were all busily engaged in raising noises of the loudest and most inharmonious kind. Upon inquiry, I found that a battle had been lately fought between the Ottawas and the Kickapoos, and that the object of all this noise was to prevent the ghosts of the departed combatants from entering the village."³ Again, after the North American Indians had burned and tortured a prisoner to death, they used to run through the village, beating the walls, the furniture, and the roofs of the huts with sticks and yelling at the pitch of their voices to drive away the angry ghost of the victim, lest he should seek to avenge the injuries done to his scorched and mutilated body.⁴ Similarly among the Papuans of Doreh in Dutch New Guinea, when a murder has been committed in the village, the inhabitants assemble for several evenings successively and shriek and shout to frighten away the ghost, in case he should attempt to come back.⁵ The Yabim, a tribe in

¹ Rev. E. B. Cross, "On the Karens," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, iv. No. 2 (New York, 1854), pp. 312 sq.

² Bringaud, "Les Karins de la Birmanie," *Les Missions catholiques*, xx. (1888) p. 208.

³ W. H. Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Sources of St. Peter's*

River (London, 1825), i. 109.

⁴ Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1744), vi. 77, 122 sq.; J. F. Lafitau, *Mœurs des sauvages américains* (Paris, 1724), ii. 279.

⁵ H. von Rosenberg, *Der malayische Archipel* (Leipsic, 1878), p. 461. Compare J. L. van Hasselt, "Die Papuastämme an der Geelvinkbai

German New Guinea, believe that "the dead can both help and harm, but the fear of their harmful influence is predominant. Especially the people are of opinion that the ghost of a slain man haunts his murderer and brings misfortune on him. Hence it is necessary to drive away the ghost with shrieks and the beating of drums. The model of a canoe laden with taro and tobacco is got ready to facilitate his departure."¹ The Fijians used to bury the sick and aged alive, and having done so they always made a great uproar with bamboos, shell-trumpets, and so forth in order to scare away the spirits of the buried people and prevent them from returning to their homes; and by way of removing any temptation to hover about their former abodes they dismantled the houses of the dead and hung them with everything that in their eyes seemed most repulsive.² Among the Angoni, a Zulu tribe settled to the north of the Zambesi, warriors who have slain foes on an expedition smear their bodies and faces with ashes, and hang garments of their victims on their persons. This costume they wear for three days after their return, and rising at break of day they run through the village uttering frightful yells to banish the ghosts of the slain, which otherwise might bring sickness and misfortune on the people.³

In Travancore the spirits of men who have died a violent death by drowning, hanging, or other means are supposed to become demons, wandering about to inflict injury in various ways upon mankind. Especially the ghosts of murderers who have been hanged are believed to haunt the place of execution and its neighbourhood. To prevent this it used to be customary to cut off the criminal's heels with a sword or to hamstring him as he was turned off.⁴ The intention of thus mutilating the body was no doubt to

(Neuginea)," *Mitteilungen der geographischen Gesellschaft zu Jena*, ix. (1891) p. 101.

¹ K. Vetter, "Über papuanische Rechtsverhältnisse," in *Nachrichten über Kaiser Wilhelms-Land und den Bismarck-Archipel* (1897), p. 94; B. Hagen, *Unter den Papuas* (Wiesbaden, 1899), p. 266.

² John Jackson, in J. E. Erskine's *Journal of a Cruise among the Islands*

of the Western Pacific (London, 1853), p. 477.

³ C. Wiese, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Zulu im Norden des Zambesi," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xxxii. (1900) pp. 197 sq.

⁴ Rev. Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity, a Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People* (London, 1871), pp. 203 sq.

prevent the ghost from walking. How could he walk if he were hamstrung or had no heels? With precisely the same intention it has been customary with some peoples to maim in various ways the dead bodies not only of executed criminals but of other persons; for all ghosts are more or less dreaded. When any bad man died, the Esquimaux of Bering Strait used in the old days to cut the sinews of his arms and legs "in order to prevent the shade from returning to the body and causing it to walk at night as a ghoul."¹ The Omaha Indians said that when a man was killed by lightning he should be buried face downwards, and that the soles of his feet should be slit; for if this were not done, his ghost would walk.² The Herero of South Africa think that the ghosts of bad people appear and are just as mischievous as in life; for they rob, steal, and seduce women and girls, sometimes getting them with child. To prevent the dead from playing these pranks the Herero used to cut through the backbone of the corpse, tie it up in a bunch, and sew it into an ox-hide.³ A simple way of disabling a dangerous ghost is to dig up his body and decapitate it. This is done by West African negroes and also by the Armenians; to make assurance doubly sure the Armenians not only cut off the head but smash it or stick a needle into it or into the dead man's heart.⁴ The Hindoos of the Punjaub believe that if a mother dies within thirteen days of her delivery, she will return in the guise of a malignant spirit to torment her husband and family. To prevent this some people drive nails through her head and eyes, while others also knock nails on either side of the door of the house.⁵ A gentler way of attaining the same end is to put a nail or a piece of iron in the clothes of the poor dead mother.⁶ In Bilaspore, if a

¹ E. W. Nelson, "The Eskimo about Bering Strait," *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Part i. (Washington, 1899) p. 423.

² Rev. J. Owen Dorsey, "A Study of Siouan Cults," *Eleventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington, 1894), p. 420.

³ Dr. P. H. Brincker, "Character, Sitten, und Gebräuche speciell der Bantu Deutsch-Südwestafrikas," *Mit-*

teilungen des Seminars für orientalischen Sprachen zu Berlin, iii. dritte Abteilung (1900), pp. 89 sq.

⁴ Rev. R. H. Nassau, *Fetichism in West Africa* (London, 1904), p. 220; M. Abeghian, *Der armenische Volksglaube* (Leipsic, 1899), p. 11.

⁵ H. A. Rose, "Hindu Birth Observances in the Punjab," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, xxxvii. (1907) pp. 225 sq.

⁶ G. F. D' Penha, "Superstitions

mother dies leaving very young children, they tie her hands and feet before burial to prevent her from getting up by night and going to see her orphaned little ones.¹ The ghosts of women who die in child-bed are much dreaded in the Indian Archipelago ; it is supposed that they appear in the form of birds with long claws and are exceedingly dangerous to their husbands and also to pregnant women. A common way of guarding against them is to put an egg under each armpit of the corpse, to press the arms close against the body, and to stick needles in the palms of the hands. The people believe that the ghost of the dead woman will be unable to fly and attack people ; for she will not spread out her arms for fear of letting the eggs fall, and she will not clutch anybody for fear of driving the needles deeper into her palms. Sometimes by way of additional precaution another egg is placed under her chin, thorns are thrust into the joints of her fingers and toes, and her hands, feet, and hair are nailed to the coffin.² Some Sea Dyaks of Borneo sow the ground near cemeteries with bits of stick to imitate caltrops, in order that the feet of any ghosts who walk over them may be lamed.³ The Besis of the Malay Peninsula bury their dead in the ground and let fall knives on the grave to prevent the

and Customs in Salsette," *The Indian Antiquary*, xxviii. (1899), p. 115. As to these perturbed and perturbing spirits in India, see further W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), i. 269-274. They are called *churel*.

¹ E. M. Gordon, *Indian Folk Tales* (London, 1908), p. 47.

² Van Schmidt, "Aanteekeningen nopens de zeden, etc., der bevolking van de eilanden Saparoea, etc.," *Tijdschrift voor Neêrlands Indië*, v. Tweede Deel (Batavia, 1843), pp. 528 sqq. ; G. Heijmering, "Zeden en gewoonten op het eiland Timor," *Tijdschrift voor Neerlands Indië*, vii. Negende Aflevering (Batavia, 1845), pp. 278 sq., note ; B. F. Matthes, *Bijdragen tot de Ethnologie van Zuid-Celebes* (The Hague, 1875), p. 97 ; W. E. Maxwell, "Folk-lore of the Malays," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 7

(June 1881), p. 28 ; W. W. Skeat, *Malay Magic* (London, 1900), p. 325 ; J. G. F. Riedel, *De sluik- en kroesharige rassen tusschen Selebes en Papua* (The Hague, 1886), p. 81 ; A. C. Kruijt, "Eenige ethnografische aanteekeeningen omtrent de Toboengkoe en de Tomori," *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap*, xlv. (Rotterdam, 1900), p. 218 ; *id.*, *Het animisme in den Indischen Archipel* (The Hague, 1906), p. 252 ; G. A. Wilken, *Handleiding voor de vergelijkende Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Leyden, 1893), p. 559. The common name for these dreaded ghosts is *pontianak*. For a full account of them see A. C. Kruijt, *Het Animisme in den Indischen Archipel*, pp. 245 sqq.

³ J. Perham, "Sea Dyak Religion," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, No. 14 (Singapore, 1885), pp. 291 sq.

ghost from getting up out of it.¹ The Tunguses of Turukhansk on the contrary put their dead up in trees, and then lop off all the branches to prevent the ghost from coming down and giving them chase.² The Herbert River natives in Queensland used to cut holes in the stomach, shoulders, and lungs of their dead and fill the holes with stones, in order that, weighed down with this ballast, the ghost might not stray far afield; to limit his range still further they commonly broke his legs.³ Other Australian blacks put hot coals in the ears of their departed brother; this keeps the ghost in the body for a time, and allows the relations to get a good start away from him. Also they bark the trees in a circle round the spot, so that when the ghost does get out and makes after them, he wanders round and round in a circle, always returning to the place from which he started.⁴ The ancient Hindoos put fetters on the feet of their dead that they might not return to the land of the living.⁵

Some peoples bar the road from the grave to prevent the ghost from following them. The Tunguses make the barrier of snow or trees.⁶ Amongst the Mangars, one of the fighting tribes of Nepal, "when the mourners return home, one of the party goes ahead and makes a barricade of thorn bushes across the road midway between the grave and the house of the deceased. On the top of the thorns he puts a big stone on which he takes his stand, holding a pot of burning incense in his left hand and some woollen thread in his right. One by one the mourners step on the stone and pass through the smoke of the incense to the other side of the thorny barrier. As they pass, each takes a piece of thread from the man who holds the incense and ties it round his neck. The object of this curious ceremony is to prevent the spirit of the dead man from coming home with the mourners and establishing itself in its old haunts.

¹ W. W. Skeat and C. O. Blagden, *Pagan Races of the Malay Peninsula* (London, 1906), ii. 109.

² T. de Pauly, *Description ethnographique des peuples de la Russie* (St. Petersburg, 1862), *Peuples ouralo-altaïques*, p. 71.

³ A. W. Howitt, *Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London, 1904),

p. 474.

⁴ A. W. Howitt, *op. cit.* p. 473.

⁵ H. Zimmer, *Altindisches Leben* (Berlin, 1879), p. 402.

⁶ T. de Pauly, *Description ethnographique des peuples de la Russie* (St. Petersburg, 1862), *Peuples ouralo-altaïques*, p. 71.

Conceived of as a miniature man, it is believed to be unable to make its way on foot through the thorns, while the smell of the incense, to which all spirits are highly sensitive, prevents it from surmounting this obstacle on the shoulders of one of the mourners.”¹ The Algonquin Indians, not content with beating the walls of their huts to drive away the ghost, stretched nets round them in order to catch the spirit in the meshes, if he attempted to enter the house. Others made stinks to keep him off.² The Ojebways also resorted to a number of devices for warding off the spirits of the dead. These have been described as follows by a writer who was himself an Ojebway: “If the deceased was a husband, it is often the custom for the widow, after the burial is over, to spring or leap over the grave, and then run zigzag behind the trees, as if she were fleeing from some one. This is called running away from the spirit of her husband, that it may not haunt her. In the evening of the day on which the burial has taken place, when it begins to grow dark, the men fire off their guns through the hole left at the top of the wigwam. As soon as this firing ceases, the old women commence knocking and making such a rattling at the door as would frighten away any spirit that would dare to hover near. The next ceremony is, to cut into narrow strips, like ribbon, thin birch bark. These they fold into shapes, and hang round inside the wigwam, so that the least puff of wind will move them. With such scarecrows as these, what spirit would venture to disturb their slumbers? Lest this should not prove effectual, they will also frequently take a deer’s tail, and after burning or singeing off all the hair, will rub the necks or faces of the children before they lie down to sleep, thinking that the offensive smell will be another preventive to the spirit’s entrance. I well remember when I used to be daubed over with this disagreeable fumigation, and had great faith in it all. Thinking that the soul lingers about

¹ (Sir) H. H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Ethnographic Glossary*, ii. (Calcutta, 1891) pp. 75 sq. Compare E. T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Districts of the North-Western Provinces of India*, ii. (Allahabad, 1884) p. 832 ;

W. Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Westminster, 1896), ii. 57.

² *Relations des jésuites*, 1639, p. 44 (Canadian reprint).

the body a long time before it takes its final departure, they use these means to hasten it away.”¹

The Lengua Indians of the Gran Chaco in South America live in great fear of the spirits of their dead. They imagine that any one of these disembodied spirits can become incarnate again and take a new lease of life on earth, if only it can contrive to get possession of a living man's body during the temporary absence of his soul. For like many other savages they imagine that the soul absents itself from the body during sleep to wander far away in the land of dreams. So when night falls, the ghosts of the dead come crowding to the villages and lurk about, hoping to find vacant bodies into which they can enter. Such are to the thinking of the Lengua Indian the perils and dangers of the night. When he awakes in the morning from a dream in which he seemed to be hunting or fishing far away, he concludes that his soul cannot yet have returned from such a far journey, and that the spirit within him must therefore be some ghost or demon, who has taken possession of his corporeal tenement in the absence of its proper owner. And if these Indians dread the spirits of the departed at all times, they dread them doubly at the moment when they have just shuffled off the mortal coil. No sooner has a person died than the whole village is deserted. Even if the death takes place shortly before sunset the place must at all costs be immediately abandoned, lest with the shades of night the ghost should return and do a mischief to the villagers. Not only is the village deserted, but every hut is burned down and the property of the dead man destroyed. For these Indians believe that however good and kind a man may have been in his lifetime, his ghost is always a source of danger to the peace and prosperity of the living. The night after his death his disembodied spirit comes back to the village, and chilled by the cool night air looks about for a fire at which to warm himself. He rakes in the ashes to find at least a hot coal which he may blow up into a flame. But if they are all cold and dead, he flings a handful of them in the air and departs in dudgeon. Any Indian who treads on such

¹ Rev. Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians* (London, n.d.), pp. 99 sq.

ashes will have ill-luck, if not death, following at his heels. To prevent such mishaps the villagers take the greatest pains to collect and bury all the ash-heaps before they abandon the village. What the fate of a hamlet would be in which the returning ghost found the inhabitants still among their houses, no Indian dares to imagine. Hence it happens that many a village which was full of life at noon is a smoking desert at sunset. And as the Lenguas ascribe all sickness to the machinations of evil spirits and sorcerers, they mutilate the persons of their dying or dead in order to counteract and punish the authors of the disease. For this purpose they cut off the portion of the body in which the evil spirit is supposed to have ensconced himself. A common operation performed on the dying or dead man is this. A gash is made with a knife in his side, the edges of the wound are drawn apart with the fingers, and in the wound are deposited a dog's bone, a stone, and the claw of an armadillo. It is believed that at the departure of the soul from the body the stone will rise up to the Milky Way and will stay there till the author of the death has been discovered. Then the stone will come shooting down in the shape of a meteor and kill, or at least stun, the guilty party. That is why these Indians stand in terror of falling stars. The claw of the armadillo serves to grub up the earth and, in conjunction with the meteor, to ensure the destruction of the evil spirit or the sorcerer. What the virtue of the dog's bone is supposed to be has not yet been ascertained by the missionaries.¹

The Bhotias, who inhabit the Himalayan district of British India, perform an elaborate ceremony for transferring the spirit of a deceased person to an animal, which is finally beaten by all the villagers and driven away, that it may not come back. Having thus expelled the ghost the people return joyfully to the village with songs and dances. In

¹ "Sitten und Gebräuche der Lengua-Indianer, nach Missionsberichten von G. Kurze," *Mitteilungen der geographischen Gesellschaft zu Jena*, xxiii. (1905) pp. 17 sq., 19 sq., 21 sq. The Cross River natives of Southern Nigeria, like the Lengua Indians, cut off the

diseased members of a corpse, in the belief that if they did not do so the person would suffer from the same disease at his next reincarnation. See Charles Partridge, *Cross River Natives* (London, 1905), pp. 238 sq.

some places the animal which thus serves as a scape-goat is a yak, the forehead, back, and tail of which must be white. But elsewhere, under the influence of Hindooism, sheep and goats have been substituted for yaks.¹

Widows and widowers are especially obnoxious to the ghosts of their deceased spouses, and accordingly they have to take special precautions against them. For example, among the Ewe negroes of Agome, in German Togoland, a widow is bound to remain for six weeks in the hut where her husband lies buried. She is naked, her hair is shaved off, and she is armed with a stick with which to repel the too pressing familiarities of her husband's ghost; for were she to submit to them, she would die on the spot. At night she sleeps with the stick under her, lest the wily ghost should attempt to steal it from her in the hours of slumber. Before she eats or drinks she always puts some coals on the food or the beverage, to prevent her dead husband from eating or drinking with her; for if he did so, she would die. If any one calls to her, she must not answer, for her dead husband would hear her, and she would die. She may not eat beans or flesh or fish, nor drink palm-wine or rum, but she is allowed to smoke tobacco. At night a fire is kept up in the hut, and the widow throws powdered peppermint leaves and red pepper on the flames to make a stink, which helps to keep the ghost from the house.²

Among many tribes of British Columbia the conduct of a widow and a widower for a long time after the death of their spouse is regulated by a code of minute and burdensome restrictions, all of which appear to be based on the notion that these persons, being haunted by the ghost, are not only themselves in peril, but are also a source of danger to others. Thus among the Shushwap Indians of British Columbia widows and widowers fence their beds with thorn bushes to keep off the ghost of the deceased; indeed they lie on such bushes, in order that the ghost may be under little

¹ Charles A. Sherring, *Western Tibet and the British Borderland* (London, 1906), pp. 127-132.

² Lieutenant Herold, "Bericht betreffend religiöse Anschauungen und Gebräuche der deutschen Ewe-Neger,"

Mitteilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den deutschen Schutzgebieten, v. Heft 4 (Berlin, 1892), p. 155; H. Klose, *Togo unter deutschen Flagge* (Berlin, 1899), p. 274.

temptation to share their bed of thorns. They must build a sweat-house on a creek, sweat there all night, and bathe regularly in the creek, after which they must rub their bodies with spruce branches. These branches may be used only once for this purpose; afterwards they are stuck in the ground all round about the hut, probably to fence off the ghost. The mourners must also use cups and cooking vessels of their own, and they may not touch their own heads or bodies. Hunters may not go near them, and any person on whom their shadow were to fall would at once be ill.¹ Again, among the Tsetsaut Indians, when a man dies his brother is bound to marry the widow, but he may not do so before the lapse of a certain time, because it is believed that the dead man's ghost haunts his widow and would do a mischief to his living rival. During the time of her mourning the widow eats out of a stone dish, carries a pebble in her mouth, and a crab-apple stick up the back of her jacket. She sits upright day and night. Any person who crosses the hut in front of her is a dead man. The restrictions laid on a widower are similar.² Among the Lkungen or Songish Indians, in Vancouver Island, widow and widower, after the death of husband or wife, are forbidden to cut their hair, as otherwise it is believed that they would gain too great power over the souls and welfare of others. They must remain alone at their fire for a long time and are forbidden to mingle with other people. When they eat, nobody may see them. They must keep their faces covered for ten days. For two days after the burial they fast and are not allowed to speak. After that they may speak a little, but before addressing any one they must go into the woods and clean themselves in ponds and with cedar-branches. If they wish to harm an enemy they call out his name when they first break their fast, and they bite very hard in eating. That is believed to kill their enemy, probably (though this is not said) by directing the attention of the ghost to him.

¹ Franz Boas, in *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*, p. 92 (*Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Leeds, 1890, separate reprint).

² Franz Boas, in *Tenth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*, p. 45 (*Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Ipswich, 1895, separate reprint).

They may not go near the water nor eat fresh salmon, or the fish might be driven away. They may not eat warm food, else their teeth would fall out.¹ Among the Bella Coola Indians the bed of a mourner is protected against the ghost of the deceased by thorn-bushes stuck into the ground at each corner. He rises early in the morning and goes out into the woods, where he makes a square with thorn-bushes, and inside of this square, where he is probably supposed to be safe from the intrusion of the ghost, he cleanses himself by rubbing his body with cedar-branches. He also swims in ponds, and after swimming he cleaves four small trees and creeps through the clefts, following the course of the sun. This he does on four subsequent mornings, cleaving new trees every day. We may surmise that the intention of creeping through the cleft trees is to give the slip to the ghost. The mourner also cuts his hair short, and the cut hair is burnt. If he did not observe these regulations, it is believed that he would dream of the deceased, which to the savage mind is another way of saying that he would be visited by his ghost. Amongst these Indians the rules of mourning for a widower or widow are especially strict. For four days he or she must fast and may not speak a word, else the dead wife or husband would come and lay a cold hand on the mouth of the offender, who would die. They may not go near water and are forbidden to catch or eat salmon for a whole year. During that time also they may not eat fresh herring or candle-fish (olachen). Their shadows are deemed unlucky and may not fall on any person.²

Among the Thompson Indians of British Columbia widows or widowers, on the death of their husbands or wives, went out at once and passed through a patch of rose-bushes four times. The intention of this ceremony is not reported, but we may conjecture that it was supposed to deter the ghost from following for fear of scratching himself on the thorns. For four days after the death widows and widowers

¹ Franz Boaz, in *Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*, pp. 23 sq. (*Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Leeds, 1890, separate reprint).

² Franz Boaz, in *Seventh Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*, p. 13 (*Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Cardiff, 1891, separate reprint).

had to wander about at evening or break of day wiping their eyes with fir-twigs, which they hung up in the branches of trees, praying to the Dawn. They also rubbed their eyes with a small stone taken from under running water, then threw it away, while they prayed that they might not become blind. The first four days they might not touch their food, but ate with sharp-pointed sticks, and spat out the first four mouthfuls of each meal, and the first four of water, into the fire. For a year they had to sleep on a bed made of fir-branches, on which rose-bush sticks were also spread at the foot, head, and middle. Many also wore a few small twigs of rose-bush on their persons. The use of the rose-bush was no doubt to keep off the ghost through fear of the prickles. They were forbidden to eat fresh fish and flesh of any kind for a year. A widower might not fish at another man's fishing-place or with another man's net. If he did, it would make the station and the net useless for the season. If a widower transplanted a trout into another lake, before releasing it he blew on the head of the fish, and after chewing deer-fat, he spat some of the grease out on its head, so as to remove the baneful effect of his touch. Then he let it go, bidding the fish farewell, and asking it to propagate its kind. Any grass or branches upon which a widow or widower sat or lay down withered up. If a widow were to break sticks or branches, her own hands or arms would break. She might not cook food or fetch water for her children, nor let them lie down on her bed, nor should she lie or sit where they slept. Some widows wore a breech-cloth made of dry bunch-grass for several days, lest the ghost of her dead husband should have connection with her. A widower might not fish or hunt, because it was unlucky both for him and for other hunters. He did not allow his shadow to pass in front of another widower or of any person who was supposed to be gifted with more knowledge or magic than ordinary.¹ Among the Lillooet Indians of British Columbia the rules enjoined on widows and widowers were somewhat similar. But a widower had to observe a

¹ James Teit, *The Thompson Indians of British Columbia*, pp. 332 sq. (*The Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History*, April 1900).

singular custom in eating. He ate his food with the right hand passed underneath his right leg, the knee of which was raised. The motive for conveying food to his mouth in this roundabout fashion is not mentioned: we may conjecture that it was to baffle the hungry ghost, who might be supposed to watch every mouthful swallowed by the mourner, but who could hardly suspect that food passed under the knee was intended to reach the mouth.¹

Among the Kwakuitl Indians of British Columbia we are told "the regulations referring to the mourning period are very severe. In case of the death of husband or wife, the survivor has to observe the following rules: for four days after the death the survivor must sit motionless, the knees drawn up toward the chin. On the third day all the inhabitants of the village, including children, must take a bath. On the fourth day some water is heated in a wooden kettle, and the widow or widower drips it upon his head. When he becomes tired of sitting motionless, and must move, he thinks of his enemy, stretches his legs slowly four times, and draws them up again. Then his enemy must die. During the following sixteen days he must remain on the same spot, but he may stretch out his legs. He is not allowed, however, to move his hands. Nobody must speak to him, and whosoever disobeys this command will be punished by the death of one of his relatives. Every fourth day he takes a bath. He is fed twice a day by an old woman at the time of low water, with salmon caught in the preceding year, and given to him in the dishes and spoons of the deceased. While sitting so his mind is wandering to and fro. He sees his house and his friends as though far, far away. If in his visions he sees a man near by, the latter is sure to die at no distant day; if he sees him very far away, he will continue to live long. After the sixteen days have passed, he may lie down, but not stretch out. He takes a bath every eighth day. At the end of the first month he takes off his clothing, and dresses the stump of a tree with it. After another month has passed he may sit in a corner

¹ James Teit, *The Lillooet Indians* (Leyden and New York, 1906), p. 271
(*The Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, *Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History*).

of the house, but for four months he must not mingle with others. He must not use the house door, but a separate door is cut for his use. Before he leaves the house for the first time he must three times approach the door and return, then he may leave the house. After ten months his hair is cut short, and after a year the mourning is at an end.”¹

Though the reasons for the elaborate restrictions thus imposed on widows and widowers by the Indians of British Columbia are not always stated, we may safely infer that one and all they are dictated by fear of the ghost, who haunting the surviving spouse surrounds him or her with a dangerous atmosphere, a contagion of death, which necessitates his seclusion both from the people themselves and from the principal sources of their food supply, especially from the fisheries, lest the infected person should poison them by his malignant presence. We can, therefore, understand the extraordinary treatment of a widower by the Papuans of Issoudun in British New Guinea. His miseries begin with the moment of his wife's death. He is immediately stripped of all his ornaments, abused and beaten by his wife's relations, his house is pillaged, his gardens devastated, there is no one to cook for him. He sleeps on his wife's grave till the end of his mourning. He may never marry again. By the death of his wife he loses all his rights. It is civil death for him. Old or young, chief or plebeian, he is no longer anybody, he does not count. He may not hunt or fish with the others; his presence would bring misfortune; the spirit of his dead wife would frighten the fish or the game. He is no longer heard in the discussions. He has no voice in the council of elders. He may not take part in a dance; he may not own a garden. If one of his children marries, he has no right to interfere in anything or receive any present. If he were dead, he could not be ignored more completely. He has become a nocturnal animal. He is forbidden to shew himself in public, to traverse the village, to walk in the roads and paths. Like a boar, he must go in the grass or

¹ Franz Boaz, in *Fifth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada*, pp. 43 sq. (*Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1889, separate reprint).

the bushes. If he hears or sees any one, especially a woman, coming from afar, he must hide himself behind a tree or a thicket. If he wishes to go hunting or fishing by himself, he must go at night. If he has to consult any one, even the missionary, he does it in great secrecy and by night. He seems to have lost his voice, and only speaks in a whisper. He is painted black from head to foot. The hair of his head is shaved, except two tufts which flutter on his temples. He wears a skull-cap which covers his head completely to the ears ; it ends in a point at the back of his neck. Round his waist he wears one, two, or three sashes of plaited grass ; his arms and legs from the knees to the ankles are covered with armlets and leglets of the same sort ; and round his neck he wears a similar ornament. His diet is strictly regulated, but he does not observe it more than he can help, eating in secret whatever is given him or he can lay his hands on. " His tomahawk accompanies him everywhere and always. He needs it to defend himself against the wild boars and also against the spirit of his dead wife, who might take a fancy to come and play him some mischievous prank ; for the souls of the dead come back often and their visit is far from being desired, inasmuch as all the spirits without exception are bad and have no pleasure but in harming the living. Happily people can keep them at bay by a stick, fire, an arrow, or a tomahawk. The condition of a widower, far from exciting pity or compassion, only serves to render him the object of horror and fear. Almost all widowers, in fact, have the reputation of being more or less sorcerers, and their mode of life is not fitted to give the lie to public opinion. They are forced to become idlers and thieves, since they are forbidden to work : no work, no gardens ; no gardens, no food : steal then they must, and that is a trade which cannot be plied without some audacity and knavery at a pinch." ¹

It would be easy, but superfluous, to multiply evidence of the terror which a belief in ghosts has spread among mankind, and of the consequences, sometimes tragical, sometimes

¹ Father Guis (de la Congrégation du Sacré-Cœur d'Issoudun, Missionnaire en Nouvelle-Guinée), " Les Canaques,

mort-deuil," *Les Missions catholiques*, xxxiv. (Lyons, 1902) pp. 208 sq.

ludicrous, which that belief has brought in its train.¹ The preceding instances may suffice for my purpose, which is merely to indicate the probability that this widespread superstition has served a useful purpose by enhancing the sacredness of human life. For it is reasonable to suppose that men are more loth to spill the blood of their fellows when they believe that by so doing they expose themselves to the vengeance of an angry and powerful spirit whom it is difficult either to evade or to deceive. Fortunately in this matter we are not left wholly to conjecture. In the vast empire of China, as we are assured by the best living authority on Chinese religion, the fear of ghosts has actually produced this salutary result. Amongst the Chinese the faith in the existence of the dead, in their power to reward kindness and avenge injury, is universal and inveterate; it has been handed down from an immemorial past, and it is nourished in the experience, or rather in the mind, of everybody by hundreds of ghost stories, all of which are accepted as authentic. Nobody doubts that ghosts may interfere at any moment for good or evil in the business of life, in the regulation of human destiny. To the Chinese their dead are not what our dead are to most of us, a dim sad memory, a shadowy congregation somewhere far away, to whom we may go in time, but who cannot come to us or exercise any influence on the land of the living. On the contrary, in the opinion of the Chinese the dead not only exist but keep up a most lively intercourse, an active interchange of good and evil, with the survivors. There is, indeed, even in China, a line of demarcation between men and spirits, between the living and the dead, but it is said to be very faint, almost imperceptible. This perpetual commerce between the two worlds, the material and the spiritual, is a source both of bane and of blessing: the spirits of the departed rule human destiny with a rod of iron or of gold. From them man has everything to hope, but also much to fear. Hence as a natural consequence it is to the ghosts, to the souls of the dead, that the Chinaman pays his devotions; it is around their dear or dreadful figures

¹ Elsewhere I have illustrated the fear of the dead as it is displayed in funeral customs. See my paper, "On certain Burial Customs as illustrative

of the Primitive Theory of the Soul," *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xv. (1886) pp. 64 sqq.

as a centre that his religion revolves. To ensure their goodwill and help, to avert their wrath and fierce attacks, that is the first and the last object of his religious ceremonies.¹

This faith of the Chinese in the existence and power of the dead, we are informed, "indubitably exercises a mighty and salutary influence upon morals. It enforces respect for human life and a charitable treatment of the infirm, the aged and the sick, especially if they stand on the brink of the grave. Benevolence and humanity, thus based on fears and selfishness, may have little ethical value in our eyes; but for all that, their existence in a country where culture has not yet taught man to cultivate good for the sake of good alone, may be greeted as a blessing. Those virtues are even extended to animals, for, in fact, these too have souls which may work vengeance or bring reward. But the firm belief in ghosts and their retributive justice has still other effects. It deters from grievous and provoking injustice, because the wronged party, thoroughly sure of the avenging power of his own spirit when disembodied, will not always shrink from converting himself into a wrathful ghost by committing suicide," in order to wreak in death that vengeance on his oppressor which he could not exact in life. Cases of suicide committed with this intention are said to be far from rare in China.² "This simple complex of tenets," says Professor de Groot, "lays disrespect for human lives under great restraint. Most salutarily also they work upon female infanticide, a monstrous custom practised extensively among the poor in Amoy and the surrounding farming districts, as in many other parts of the Empire. The fear that the souls of the murdered little ones may bring misfortune, induces many a father or mother to lay the girls they are unwilling to bring up, in the street for adoption into some family or into a foundling-hospital." Humane and well-to-do people take advantage of these superstitious fears to inculcate a merciful treatment of female infants; for they print and circulate gratuitously tracts which set forth many gruesome examples of punishments inflicted upon unnatural fathers

¹ J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, iv. (Leyden, 1901) pp. 436 *sqq.*, especially pp. 450, 464.

² J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, iv. 450 *sq.*

and mothers by the ghosts of their murdered daughters. These highly-coloured narratives, though they bear all the marks of a florid fancy, are said to answer their benevolent purpose perfectly; for they sink deep into the credulous minds to which they are addressed: they touch the seared conscience and the callous heart which no appeal to mere natural affection could move to pity.¹

But while the fear of the ghost has thus operated directly to enhance the sanctity of human life by deterring the cruel, the passionate, and the malignant from the shedding of blood, it has operated also indirectly to bring about the same salutary result. For not only does the hag-ridden murderer himself dread his victim's ghost, but the whole community, as we have seen, dreads it also and believes itself endangered by the murderer's presence, since the wrathful spirit which pursues him may turn on other people and rend them. Hence society has a strong motive for secluding, banishing, or exterminating the culprit in order to free itself from what it believes to be an imminent danger, a perilous pollution, a contagion of death.² To put it in another way, the community has an interest in punishing homicide. Not that the treatment of homicides by the tribe or state was originally conceived as a punishment inflicted on them: rather it was viewed as a measure of self-defence, a moral quarantine, a process of spiritual purification and disinfection, an exorcism. It was a mode of cleansing the people generally and sometimes the homicide himself from the ghostly infection, which to the primitive mind appears to be something material and tangible, something that can be literally washed or scoured away by water, pig's blood, sheep's blood, or other detergents. But when this purification took the form of laying the manslayer under restraint, banishing him from the country, or putting him to death in order to appease his victim's ghost, it was for all practical purposes indistinguishable from punishment, and the fear of it would act as a deterrent just as surely as if it had been designed

¹ J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, iv. 457-460.

² The Greek orator Antiphon observes that the presence of a homicide pollutes the whole city and brings the

curse of barrenness on the land (Antiphon, ed. F. Blass, Leipsic, 1871, pp. 13, 15, 30). See further L. R. Farnell, *The Evolution of Religion* (London, 1905), pp. 139 *sqq.*

to be a punishment and nothing else. When a man is about to be hanged, it is little consolation to him to be told that hanging is not a punishment but a purification. But the one conception slides easily and almost imperceptibly into the other; so that what was at first a religious rite, a solemn consecration or sacrifice, comes in course of time to be a purely civil function, the penalty which society exacts from those who have injured it: the sacrifice becomes an execution, the priest steps back and the hangman comes forward. Thus criminal justice was probably based in large measure on a crude form of superstition long before the subtle brains of jurists and philosophers deduced it logically, according to their various predilections, from a rigid theory of righteous retribution, a far-sighted policy of making the law a terror to evil-doers, or a benevolent desire to reform the criminal's character and save his soul in another world by hanging or burning his body in this one. If these deductions only profess to justify theoretically the practice of punishment, they may be well or ill founded; but if they claim to explain it historically, they are certainly false. You cannot thus reconstruct the past by importing into one age the ideas of another, by interpreting the earliest in terms of the latest products of mental evolution. You may make revolutions in that way, but you cannot write history.

If these views are correct, the dread of the ghost has operated in a twofold way to protect human life. On the one hand it has made every individual for his own sake more reluctant to slay his fellow, and on the other hand it has roused the whole community to punish the slayer. It has placed every man's life within a double ring-fence of morality and law. The hot-headed and the cold-hearted have been furnished with a double motive for abstaining from the last fatal step: they have had to fear the spirit of their victim on the one side and the lash of the law on the other: they are in a strait between the devil and the deep sea, between the ghost and the gallows. And when with the progress of thought the shadow of the ghost passes away, the grim shadow of the gallows remains to protect society without the aid of superstitious terrors. It is thus that custom often outlives the motive which originated it. If only an institu-

tion is good in practice, it will stand firm after its old theoretical basis has been shattered: a new and more solid, because a truer, foundation will be discovered for it to rest upon. More and more, as time goes on, morality shifts its ground from the sands of superstition to the rock of reason, from the imaginary to the real, from the supernatural to the natural. In the present case the State has not ceased to protect the lives of its peaceful citizens because the faith in ghosts is shaken. It has found a better reason than old wives' fables for guarding with the flaming sword of Justice the approach to the Tree of Life.

VI

CONCLUSION

TO sum up this brief review of the influence which superstition has exercised on the growth of institutions, I think I have shewn, or at least made probable:—

I. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for government, especially monarchical government, and has thereby contributed to the establishment and maintenance of civil order :

II. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for private property and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment :

III. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for marriage and has thereby contributed to a stricter observance of the rules of sexual morality both among the married and the unmarried :

IV. That among certain races and at certain times superstition has strengthened the respect for human life and has thereby contributed to the security of its enjoyment.

But government, private property, marriage, and respect for human life are the pillars on which rests the whole fabric of civil society. Shake them and you shake society to its foundations. Therefore if government, private property, marriage, and respect for human life are all good and essential to the very existence of civil society, then it follows that by strengthening every one of them superstition has rendered a great service to humanity. It has supplied multitudes with a motive, a wrong motive it is

true, for right action ; and surely it is better, far better for the world that men should do right from wrong motives than that they should do wrong with the best intentions. What concerns society is conduct, not opinion : if only our actions are just and good, it matters not a straw to others whether our opinions be mistaken. The danger of false opinion, and it is a most serious one, is that it commonly leads to wrong action ; hence it is unquestionably a great evil and every effort should be made to correct it. But of the two evils wrong action is in itself infinitely worse than false opinion ; and all systems of religion or philosophy which lay more stress on right opinion than on right action, which exalt orthodoxy above virtue, are so far immoral and prejudicial to the best interests of mankind : they invert the true relative importance, the real ethical value, of thought and action, for it is by what we do, not by what we think, that we are useful or useless, beneficent or maleficent to our fellows. As a body of false opinions, therefore, superstition is indeed a most dangerous guide in practice, and the evils which it has wrought are incalculable. But vast as are these evils, they ought not to blind us to the benefit which superstition has conferred on society by furnishing the ignorant, the weak, and the foolish with a motive, bad though it be, for good conduct. It is a reed, a broken reed, which has yet supported the steps of many a poor erring brother, who but for it might have stumbled and fallen. It is a light, a dim and wavering light, which, if it has lured many a mariner on the breakers, has yet guided some wanderers on life's troubled sea into a haven of rest and peace. Once the harbour lights are passed and the ship is in port, it matters little whether the pilot steered by a Jack-o'-lantern or by the stars.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is my plea for Superstition. Perhaps it might be urged in mitigation of the sentence which will be passed on the hoary-headed offender when he stands at the judgment bar. Yet the sentence, do not doubt it, is death. But it will not be executed in our time. There will be a long, long reprieve. It is as his advocate, not as his executioner, that I have appeared before you

to-night. At Athens cases of murder were tried before the Areopagus by night,¹ and it is by night that I have spoken in defence of this power of darkness. But it grows late, and with my sinister client I must vanish before the cocks crow and the morning breaks gray in the east.

¹ Lucian, *Hermotimus*, 64, κατὰ τοὺς Ἀρειοπαγίτας ποιούντα, οἳ ἐν νυκτὶ καὶ σκότῳ δικάζουσιν, ὡς μὴ ἐς τοὺς λέγοντας, ἀλλ' ἐς τὰ λεγόμενα ἀποβλέ-

ποιεν : *id.*, *De domo*, 18, εἰ μὴ τύχοι τις παντελῶς τυφλὸς ὢν ἢ ἐν νυκτὶ ὡσπερ ἢ ἐξ Ἀρείου πάγου βουλή ποιοίτο τὴν ἀκρόασιν.

THE END

